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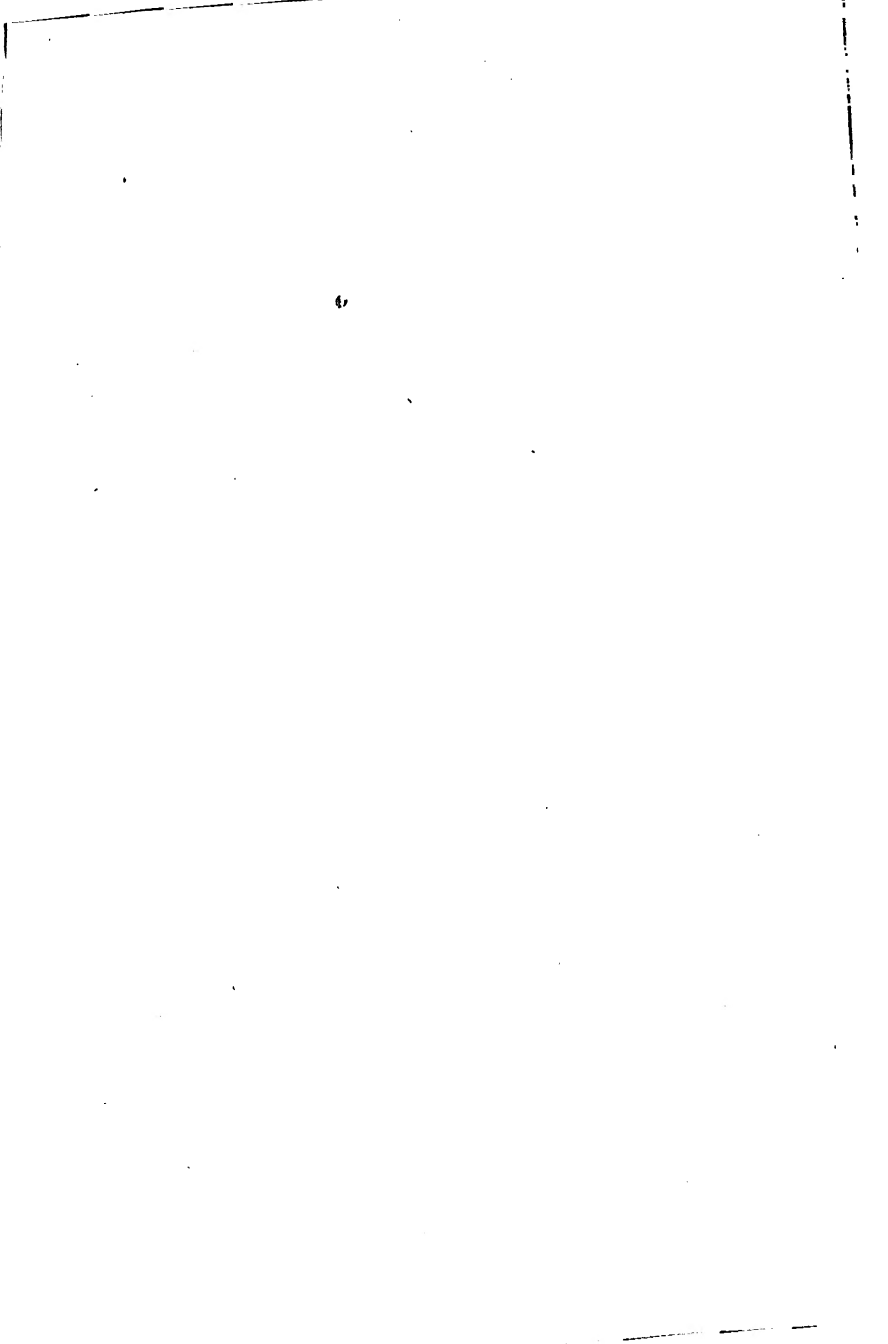
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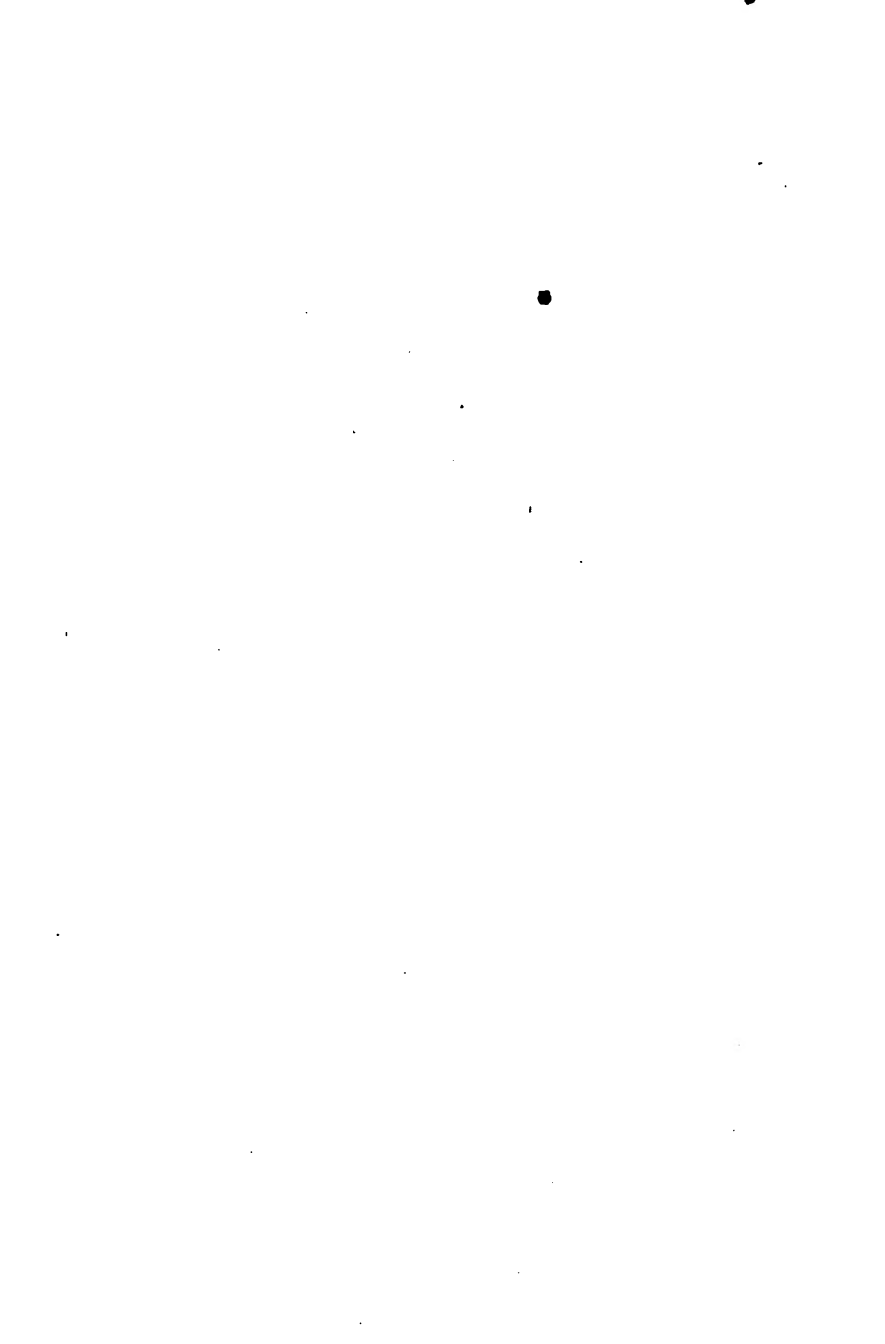
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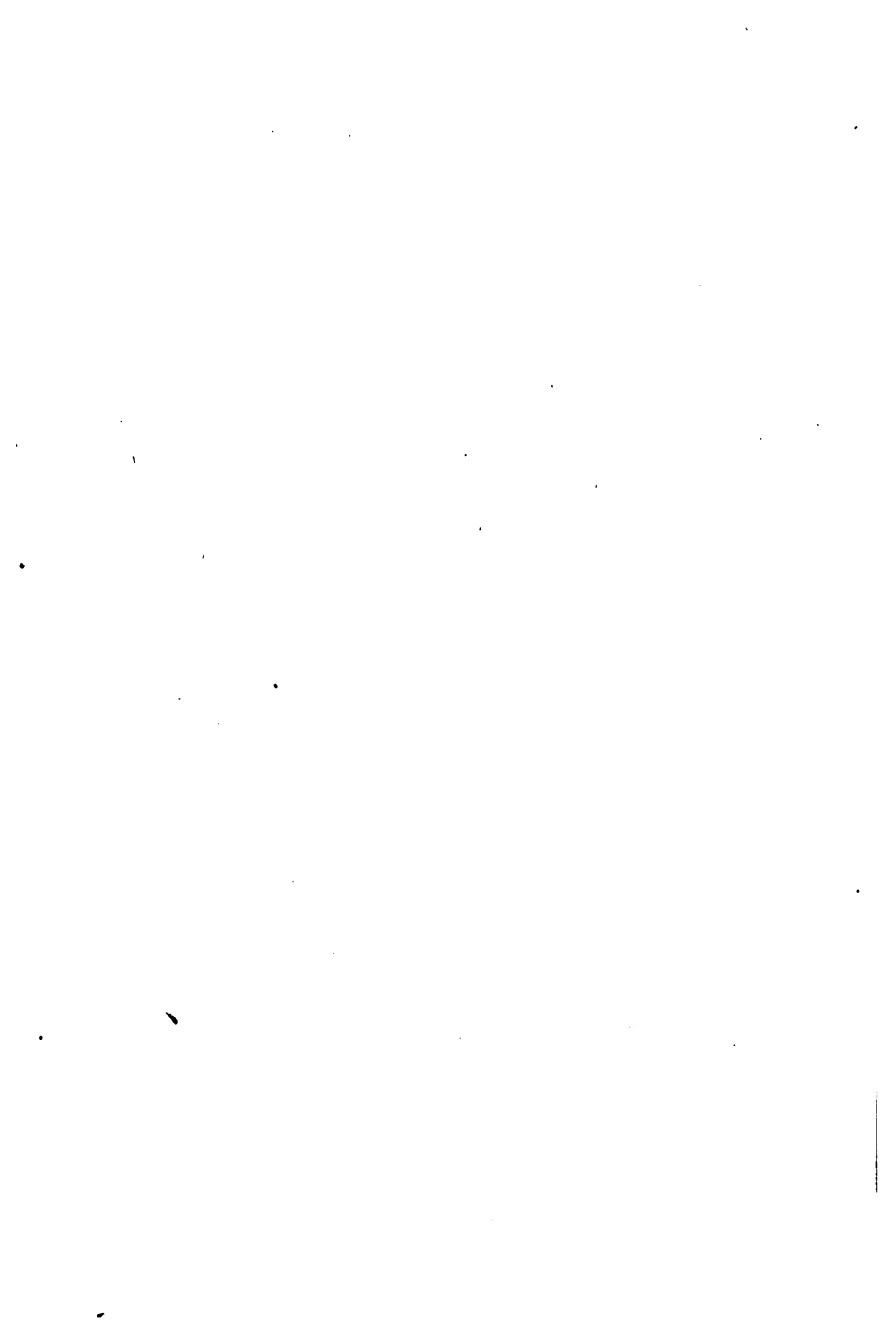
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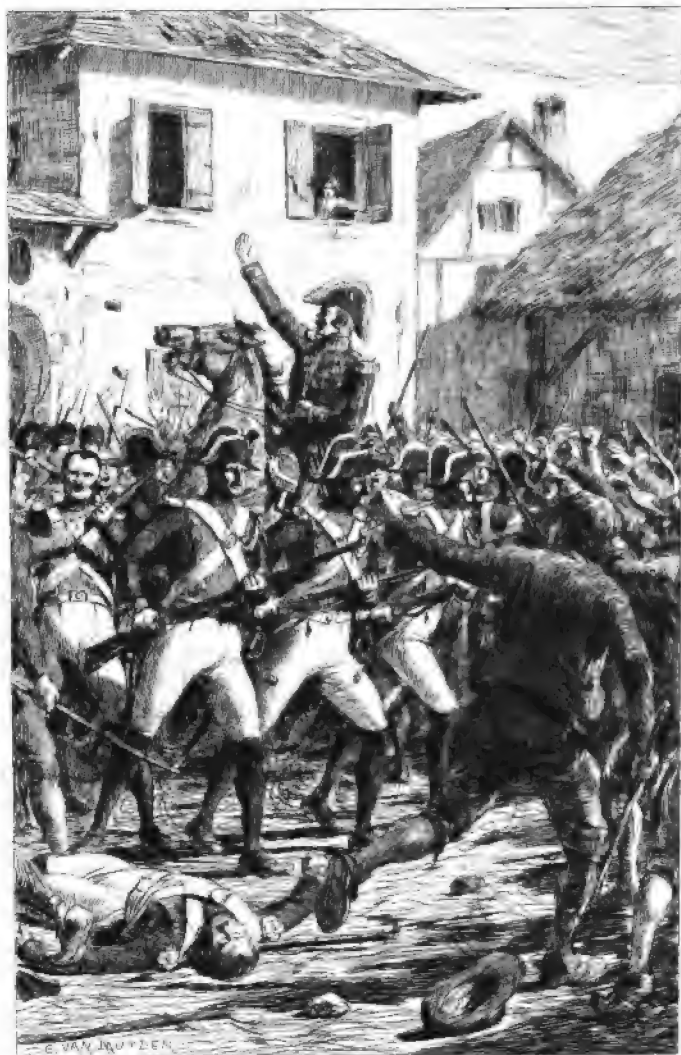
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“HELP, GRENADIERS OF THE THIRTY-
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THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, I. *Frontispiece.*

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THE
SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

BY
ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.
1894.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE attempt of the Duchesse de Berry to incite a rebellion against the government of Louis Philippe, — the “Government of July,” — in La Vendée in 1832, was chosen by Dumas as the theme of the romance contained in these volumes.

The Princess Marie Caroline, daughter of the King of the Two Sicilies, and wife of the Duc de Berry, has recently been very pleasantly introduced to English readers by the publication of English versions of M. Imbert de Saint Amand’s clever and interesting volumes.

The Duc de Berry was the son of the Comte d’Artois, who succeeded Louis XVIII., and assumed the title of Charles X. Their marriage occurred soon after the Restoration, and the Duchesse de Berry was the bright particular star of the courts of these last two Bourbon kings. Her husband was assassinated in February, 1820, and the child, referred to in these pages as Henri V., was born posthumously, receiving at first the title of Duc de Bordeaux.

At the time of the uprising in Paris in July, 1830, which eventually resulted in the accession of the Duc d'Orléans, under the title of Louis Philippe, Charles X. undertook to abdicate in favor of this young Duc de Bordeaux; but this step was taken too late, and it was found necessary for the whole royal family to leave France. They embarked at Cherbourg, and went first to England, whence they subsequently journeyed to Germany.

"The shores of France were fast fading away in the distance," says M. de Saint Amand, describing the embarkation at Cherbourg. "Sad, but resigned, Charles X. cast one parting look upon that dear land which Providence decreed that he was never to see again.

"But nothing in the bearing of the Duchesse de Berry denoted the slightest feeling of discouragement. She wore a man's hat, and there was an indefinable expression of confidence and assurance on her features; as she gazed upon the indistinct line on the horizon, which marked the coast of France, she seemed to say:—

"‘I will come again!’"

She left her father-in-law and her children in Germany, while she engaged in this fruitless attempt to re-arouse the spirit which animated the Vendéans of 1793, in the Vendéans of 1832.

The proportions assumed by the movement are

very fairly described by Dumas, who has, with that accuracy in dealing with historical facts which adds so much to the interest of his romances, faithfully followed the course which she followed in her wanderings, from her landing at Marseilles to her arrest at Nantes. The house in which she had taken refuge in the latter place, was pointed out to the authorities by one Deutz, a Jew; her hiding-place in that house, and the manner of its discovery are accurately described in these pages. Her expedition was hardly looked upon seriously at any time, even by those most interested, and it is doubtful if it had the sanction of all of them.

In Greville's "Diary of the Reigns of George IV. and William IV." under date of September 28, 1832, we read: "The present (French) Government declares it cannot meet the Chambers until Antwerp is evacuated by the Dutch, and the Duchesse de Berry departed out of France, or taken. This heroine, much to the annoyance of her family, is dodging about in La Vendée, and doing rather harm than good to her cause."

Those who may desire to become better acquainted with this princess, whom Dumas presents in such an attractive light, will find a most delightful picture of all that was best in the life of the court, of which her position as well as her disposition made her the brightest ornament, in the

"Memoirs of the Duchesse de Gontaut," who was governess of the young Duc de Bordeaux and of his sister, afterwards Duchess of Parma. Madame de Berry's influence was considerably weakened shortly after her expedition in 1832, by the discovery that she had been secretly married to one of her suite.

The Duc de Bordeaux, or Henri V., — the king without a throne, — was living within the memory of the present generation, by whom he will be remembered as the Comte de Chambord, the last representative in the male line of the elder branch of the descendants of Louis XIV.

The romance which our author has built upon this foundation introduces us to some of the most attractive of the innumerable characters he has created, — notably the "She-wolves" themselves, and Jean Oullier, the perfect type of the shrewd, self-contained, unforgiving, unreasoningly loyal Vendean peasant of the days of the "great war." One must go far to seek two fairer examples of pure and innocent womanhood than Bertha and Mary de Souday, — alike in this, though so different in character and temperament. The progress of their friendship with the young Baron Michel to its inevitable result is of engrossing interest, not only because of the complications to which it leads, but also from the ennobling effect of the tender passion

upon the hero, who becomes changed, under its influence, from a timid, bashful, effeminate boy to a determined, courageous, self-reliant man.

It has been said of Dumas that he was not a "moral writer;" it may be doubted whether that can justly be said, by way of reproach, of one who writes of immoral things only when he is writing of immoral times, when conduct was judged by different standards from those which now obtain,— of one whose stories, in short, are as truthful in their delineation of the manners and morals of the times in which they are laid as in their narration of occurrences which are matters of history. That Dumas is such a one is abundantly proved by the contrast between those of his tales of which the scene is laid at the voluptuous and immoral court of Louis XIV., and the "Black Tulip," the action of which takes place contemporaneously in staid and respectable Holland; and if further proof be needed, it may be found in the following pages, which tell the sweet, pure story of the two lovely and lovable girls who were scornfully called, in very envy of their beauty and charm, the "She-wolves of Machecoul."

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

Period, 1795-1843.

LOUIS XVIII., King of France.

LOUIS PHILIPPE.

PRINCESS MARIE-CAROLINE, Duchess^e de Berry, assuming the title of Regent, and travelling under the name of Petit-Pierre.

COMTE HENRI DE BONNEVILLE,

BARON DE LUSSAC,

MARQUIS DE SOUDAY,

JEAN OULLIER, in the service of Marquis de Souday,

AUGUSTE FRANÇOIS MICHEL DE LA LOGERIE,

M. LE COMTE DE VOUILLÉ,

MADAME LA COMTESSE DE VOUILLÉ,

M. DE LA MYRE,

GENERAL GASPARD,

COMMISSIONNAIRE-GÉNÉRAL PASCAL,

LOUIS RENAUD,

CŒUR-DE-LION,

ACHILLE,

AUBIN COURTE-JOIE, a cripple, proprietor of a
Cabaret at Montaigu,

TRIGAUD, a beggar,

MADemoiselle BERTHA DE SOUDAY, } daughters of Marquis
MADemoiselle MARY DE SOUDAY, } de Souday.

BARON MICHEL DE LA LOGERIE,

BARONNE DE LA LOGERIE, his wife.

MESSIRE BAPTISTE DURAND DE LA LOGERIE, her father.

PÈRE COURTIN, tenant-farmer of Michel and Mayor of La Logerie.

Adherents
of the
Duchesse
de Berry.

LORiot, a notary of Machecoul.
 Eva, mistress of Marquis de Souday.
 M. HYACINTHE, agent of the government.
 MASTER JACQUES, leader of a band of Chouans.
 JOSEPH PICAUT, a Chouan.
 PASCAL PICAUT, his brother.
 MARIANNE, wife of Pascal Picaut.
 MOTHER CHAMPRÉ, Marianne's mother.
 GOODMAN TINGUEY, a Chouan peasant.
 ROSINE, his daughter, foster-sister of Michel.
 THOMAS TINGUEY, her brother.
 GUÉRIN,
 PATRY,
 THE GAMBIEB BROTHERS, } Chouans.
 CHARETTE,
 LA ROCHEJACQUELIN, } Vendean leaders in 1796.
 GENERAL TRAVOT.
 GENERAL DERMONCOURT.
 BOSSARD,
 LAROCHE-DAVO, } of Charette's troops.
 PFIFFER,
 LIMOUSIN, } soldiers.
 PINGUET,
 PÈRE EUSTACHE.
 MASTER MARC, a member of the Paris Bar.
 MARIETTE, Courte-Joie's niece.
 DOCTOR ROGER.
 THE MAYOR OF CHÂTELLERAULT.
 THE PREFECT OF LA VIENNE.
 THE SUB-PREFECT OF MONTAIGU.
 THE PREFECT OF NANTES.
 CHARLOTTE MOREAU, } servants.
 MARIE BOISSY,
 CAPTAIN OF THE JEUNE CHARLES.
 SECOND MATE OF THE JEUNE CHARLES.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

“HELP, GRENADIERS OF THE THIRTY-SECOND!”

Vol. I. *Frontispiece*

Drawn and etched by E. Van Muyden.

LOUIS PHILIPPE Page 201

THE ROOM IN THE LITTLE TOWER 357

Drawn by Félix Oudart.

“‘YES,’ SAID MASTER JACQUES, ‘THE WOLVES ARE
OUT!’” 489

Drawn by E. Van Muyden.

“HE THOUGHT HE HEARD STEPS BEHIND HIM”

Vol. II. *Frontispiece*

Drawn and etched by E. Van Muyden.

DUCHESSE DE BERRY Page 128

THE WOUNDED SHE-WOLF 395

Drawn by E. Van Muyden.

THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

“M. DE CHATEAU-RENAUD WAS STRETCHED ON THE
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THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

CHAPTER I.

CHARETTE'S AIDE-DE-CAMP.

IF you have ever chanced, dear reader, to go from Nantes to Bourgneuf, you have, on reaching Saint Philbert, cut across, so to speak, the southern corner of the lake of Grand-Lieu, and continuing your journey, have arrived after one hour or two, according as you were walking or driving, at the outskirts of the forest of Machecoul.

At that point, in the midst of a grove of considerable size which seems to belong to the forest, being separated from it only by the high road, you have probably espied the tapering points of two slender towers, and the grayish roof of a little castle, almost hidden by the leaves. The cracked walls of this country-seat, its broken windows, and the wild iris and damp mosses which almost cover its exterior, impart to it, notwithstanding its feudal pretensions and the towers by which it is flanked, so poor an appearance, that it certainly would never excite the envy of anybody casting an eye upon it in passing, except for its charming situation, opposite the venerable monarchs of the Machecoul forest, whose verdant waves bound the prospect on every side, as far as the eye can reach.

In 1831 this little castle was the property of an old gentleman named the Marquis de Souday, and was called the Château de Souday from the name of its lord.

Let us seek to make the lord's acquaintance, having said a word as to the château.

The Marquis de Souday was the only representative and last heir of an old and illustrious family of Bretagne; for the lake of Grand-Lieu, the forest of Machecoul, the town of Bourgneuf — all situated in that part of France which is to-day included in the department of Loire-Inférieure — belonged to the province of Bretagne before France was divided into "departments." The race from which the Marquis de Souday descended, was in the olden time one of those feudal trees with immense and wide-spreading branches, in whose shade lay a whole province; but the immediate ancestors of the marquis, by dint of wasting their substance in order to make a fine showing in the king's carriages, had so lopped and trimmed the parent stem that '89 had come just in the nick of time to prevent the decayed trunk from being hewn down by the hand of an officer of the law; reserving it, however, for an end little in accordance with its past grandeur.

When the death-knell of the Bastille was rung, when the old abode of the kings crumbled and fell, presaging the fall of royalty itself, the Marquis de Souday, who had already succeeded to the name of his fathers, if not to their property, — of which nought remained but the little country-seat we have described, — was first page to his royal Highness, the Comte de Provence.

At sixteen years, — the marquis had then reached that age, — occurrences of every nature seem to be little else than accidents, and it was difficult not to become utterly reckless at the Epicurean, Voltairian, constitu-

tional court of the Luxembourg, where supreme selfishness was the prevailing sentiment.

It was M. de Souday who was sent to the Place de Grève to take note of the moment when the executioner should twist the cord around the neck of Favras, and he, by conveniently expiring, should restore to his royal Highness his peace of mind, momentarily shaken.

Souday had returned at full speed to the Luxembourg.

"Monseigneur, it is over!" he shouted.

And Monseigneur, with his clear, flute-like voice, had replied, —

"To the table, messieurs! to the table!"

Heartily did they sup, too, as if a worthy gentleman who sacrificed his life freely for his Highness had not just been hanged like a common murderer and vagabond.

Then ensued the first sombre days of the Revolution, the publication of the red book, the retirement of Necker, and the death of Mirabeau.

On a certain day — it was the 22d February, 1791, — an enormous crowd made its way to the Luxembourg palace and surrounded it. Various rumors were abroad. It was said that Monsieur contemplated making his escape, and joining the *émigrés*, who had assembled upon the Rhine.

But Monsieur showed himself upon the balcony, and swore a solemn oath not to leave the king. And, indeed, when he left Paris on the 21st June, it was with the king, in order not to prove false to the oath which he had taken not to leave him.

He did leave him, however, luckily for himself, and reached the frontier with his travelling companion, the Marquis d'Auvray, without hindrance, while Louis XVI. was stopped at Varennes.

Our young page thought too much of his reputation

as a young man of fashion to remain in France, where, however, the monarchy was soon to feel the need of its most ardent adherents. He emigrated like the rest; and as no one paid any attention to a page of eighteen, he reached Coblenz without molestation, and helped to fill the complement of the companies of musketeers which were being enrolled there under the command of the Marquis de Montmorin. During the earlier engagements he did his duty manfully in the field with the three Condés, and was wounded before Thionville; then, after many broken promises, he was treated to the hardest of all to bear, by the disbandment of the regiments of *émigrés*,—a measure which took away from so many poor devils, with their hopes, the soldier's crust of bread, which was their last resource.

To be sure, these soldiers were serving against France, and the bread was kneaded by the hand of a foreigner.

The Marquis de Souday then turned his eyes toward Bretagne and La Vendée, where fighting had been in progress for two years.

Affairs in La Vendée were in this position:—

All the original leaders of the uprising were dead,—Cathelineau slain at Vannes, Lescure at La Tremblaye, Bonchamp at Chollet, while D'Elbée had been or was soon to be shot at Noirmoutiers. Last of all, that which was called the *grande armée* had been cut to pieces at Mans.

This *grande armée* had been beaten at Fontenay, at Saumur, at Torfou, at Laval, and at Dol; it had had the advantage in sixty battles; it had held its own against all the forces of the Republic, commanded in turn by Biron, Rossignol, Kléber, Westermann and Marceau; it had, by declining the assistance of England, been forced to see its cabins burned, its children massacred,

its fathers murdered ; it had had for leaders Cathelineau, Henri de la Rochejaquelein, Stofflet, Bonchamp, Forestier, D'Elbée, Lescure, Marigny, and Talmont ; it had remained faithful to the king when all the rest of France had abandoned him ; it had adored its God when Paris had proclaimed that there was no God. Thanks to this *grande armée*, in short, La Vendée earned the right to be christened, in the pages of history, *the land of giants*.

Charette and La Rochejaquelein were left almost alone.

Now, while Charette had troops, La Rochejaquelein could no longer make the same claim. The fact was that while the *grande armée* was in process of being annihilated at Mans, Charette, appointed commander-in-chief in Lower Poitou, and seconded by the Chevalier de Couëtu and Jolly, had got an army together there.

Charette, at the head of his army, and La Rochejaquelein followed by no more than a paltry dozen of men, met near Maulevrier.

Charette understood when he saw La Rochejaquelein that he had to do with a general, and not a soldier. He had a very good opinion of himself, and did not choose to submit to a division of his authority, so he maintained a cold and repellent demeanor. He was about to lunch, and did not even ask La Rochejaquelein to join him at table.

That same day eight hundred men abandoned Charette's force and attached themselves to La Rochejaquelein.

The following day, Charette said to his youthful rival: —

"I am starting for Mortagne ; you will follow me."

"I have been accustomed, hitherto, to be followed, not to follow," retorted La Rochejaquelein.

He thereupon departed on his own account, leaving Charette to take such course as he thought best.

We will follow the latter, because it is he alone whose last battles and whose death are connected with our story.

Louis XVII. was no more, and Louis XVIII. was proclaimed King of France on the 26th June, 1795, at headquarters at Belleville.

On the 15th August, 1795, less than two months after this proclamation, a young man brought Charette a letter from the new king. This letter, written at Verona, under date of the 8th July, conferred upon Charette the definitive command of the Royalist forces.

Charette would have liked to send a reply to the king by the same messenger, and express his gratitude for the distinction accorded him; but the young man remarked that he had returned to France to remain, and to fight, and he requested that the despatch he had brought might serve as his credentials to the general.

Charette immediately commissioned him to serve upon his personal staff.

This youthful messenger was no other than the Marquis de Souday, Monsieur's former page.

As he withdrew to take some rest after the twenty leagues he had done in the saddle, the marquis found in his path a young guard, some five or six years older than he, who was gazing at him hat in hand, with respectful affection. He recognized the son of one of his father's tenant farmers, with whom he had hunted much and had liked much to hunt, in his earlier days; for no one was more skilful than he in turning a wild boar, or in supporting the hounds when the boar was turned.

"What!" he cried, "is it you, Jean Oullier?"

"It is myself, at your service, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the young peasant.

"Upon my word, my good fellow, you're very welcome! Are you as good a huntsman as ever?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le Marquis; only just at present it is not the boar that we're hunting, but quite different game."

"Never mind; if you choose, we will hunt this quarry together, as we used to hunt the other."

"That offer is not to be refused; not by any means, Monsieur le Marquis," replied Jean Oullier.

From that moment Jean Oullier was attached to the Marquis de Souday, as was the Marquis de Souday to Charette; that is to say, Jean Oullier was aide-de-camp to the aide-de-camp of the general commanding.

Besides his skill as a huntsman, Jean Oullier was an invaluable man. In camp he was ready to turn his hand to anything, and the Marquis de Souday had no occasion to disturb himself about details. In the darkest days the marquis never lacked a piece of bread, a glass of water, and a sack of straw; and those articles in Vendée, were luxuries which the commander-in-chief did not always enjoy.

We are strongly tempted to follow Charette, and with him our young hero, in some of those hazardous expeditions which were undertaken by the Royalist general, and which won for him the reputation of the first partisan in history; but history is a most seductive siren, and when one is imprudent enough to obey the invitation which she extends to follow her, one cannot tell whither she will lead.

We will compress our narrative then, as much as possible, and leave to other hands the task of relating the expedition of M. le Comte d'Artois to Noirmoutiers and Ile Dieu, the extraordinary conduct of that prince who remained three weeks in sight of the French coast without disembarking, and the disheartenment of the Royalist army seeing itself thus abandoned by those

whose battles it had been fighting for more than two years!

Charette nevertheless won the bloody victory of Quatre-Chemins some time after. But that was the last; for treachery took a hand in the game.

De Couëtu, Charette's right arm,—his other self since Jolly's death,—fell into an ambush, was captured and shot.

In the last weeks of his life Charette could not take a step that his adversary — Hoche or Travot, or whoever it might be — was not advised at once.

Surrounded by the Republican forces, hemmed in on all sides, tracked from thicket to thicket, crawling from one ditch to another, knowing that, a little sooner or later, he must inevitably be slain in some skirmish, or, if taken alive, shot upon the spot; without a place to hide his head, wasted by fever, dying of hunger and thirst, afraid to ask for a bit of bread or water or straw at the farms which he passed, he had but thirty-two men, including the Marquis de Souday and Jean Oullier, when, on the 25th March, 1796, he received the intelligence that four Republican columns were closing in upon him.

"Very well!" said he; "in that case we must fight to the death on this spot, and sell our lives as dearly as possible."

It was at La Prélinière in the parish of Saint Sulpice. But, with his thirty-two men, Charette was not content to await the coming of the enemy; he marched to meet them. At La Guyonnière he fell in with General Valentin, at the head of two hundred grenadiers and chasseurs.

Charette selected a good position and threw up entrenchments; and there for three hours he sustained the assaults and the fire of two hundred Republicans.

Twelve of his men fell about him. The Chouan army which numbered twenty-four thousand men when M. le Comte d'Artois was at Ile Dieu, was reduced to twenty. These twenty men stood around their general, and not a man dreamed of flight.

To make an end of the affair, General Valentin seized a musket and led a bayonet charge with the hundred and eighty men who still remained in his force. In that charge Charette received a ball in the head, and three fingers of his left hand were severed with a sabre-cut.

He was almost taken when an Alsatian named Pfeffer, whose feeling for Charette was more than devotion,—worship,—seized his commander's plumed *chapeau*, gave him his in exchange, and darted off to the left, crying to him,—

“Make your escape to the right!—they will follow me.”

Indeed, the Republicans made after him at full speed, while Charette with his last fifteen men made off in the opposite direction.

Charette was just at the forest of La Chabotière when General Travot's column appeared. Another mighty struggle began, in which Charette had no other purpose than to compel his own death.

With blood streaming from three wounds, he staggered, and was on the point of falling. A Vendean named Bos-sard took him upon his shoulders and bore him toward the woods, but fell, pierced with a musket-ball, before reaching his goal.

Another, Laroche-Davo, assumed the precious burden, took fifty steps, and fell in the ditch which lay between the woods and the open ground.

Then the Marquis de Souday took Charette in his arms, and while Jean Oullier shot dead the two Republi-

can soldiers who were pressing them most closely, cast himself into the friendly shelter of the forest with his general and the seven remaining men. Fifty paces from the plain Charette seemed to regain his strength.

"Souday," said he, "listen to my last order."

The young man halted.

"Lay me at the foot of that oak."

Souday hesitated to obey.

"I am still your general," said Charette, imperiously; "obey me, then!"

The young man's scruples were overcome, and he placed his general at the foot of the oak.

"Good!" said Charette; "now, listen to me. The king, who made me his commander-in-chief, should know how his commander-in-chief met his death. Hasten to his Majesty Louis XVIII. and tell him what thou hast seen: I wish it!"

Charette spoke in such solemn tones that the Marquis de Souday, whom then for the first time he addressed by the familiar form "thou," never thought of aught but obedience.

"Now go," continued Charette, "you have not a moment to lose. Fly; the Blues are upon us!"

At that moment, in fact, the Republicans appeared at the edge of the wood.

Souday grasped the hand which Charette held out to him.

"Kiss me," said the general.

The young man kissed him.

"Now, be gone!" said Charette.

Souday glanced at Jean Oullier.

"Are you coming?" he asked.

But Jean shook his head gloomily.

"What is there for me to do there, Monsieur le Marquis?" said he; "while here —"

"What shall you do here?"

"I will answer that question some day, if we meet again, Monsieur le Marquis."

As he spoke he discharged two balls at the two nearest Republicans. Both bit the dust. One of them was an officer of high rank, and his soldiers gathered around him.

Jean Oullier and the Marquis de Souday took advantage of this momentary reprieve to plunge into the obscurity of the forest; but after taking a few steps, Jean Oullier, finding a dense thicket, glided into it like a serpent, bidding the marquis adieu with a sign.

The Marquis de Souday pursued his way.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRATITUDE OF KINGS.

THE marquis reached the banks of the Loire, and found there a fisherman who took him to the point of Saint Gildas. An English frigate was cruising there, and for a few additional louis the fisherman put the marquis aboard of her. There he was in safety.

Two or three days later, the frigate hailed a merchant vessel which was steering for the British Channel. It was a Dutch craft, and the Marquis de Souday asked to be put aboard of her. The English captain complied, and the Dutchman landed the marquis at Rotterdam.

From Rotterdam he made his way to Blankenbourg, — a little town in the Duchy of Brunswick, selected by Louis XVIII. as his abiding place. He had Charette's last injunctions to carry out.

Louis XVIII. was at table; the feeding hour was always one of much solemnity to him.

The ex-page must needs wait until his Majesty had dined. After dinner he was introduced to the royal presence.

He narrated the occurrences which had taken place under his eyes — notably the supreme catastrophe — with such eloquence and force that his Majesty, who was far from impressionable, was sufficiently impressed to say to him, —

"Enough, enough, marquis! Yes, the Chevalier de Charette was a brave subject; we are grateful to him."

Thereupon he gave him the signal to retire. The messenger obeyed; but as he took his leave, he heard the king say in a surly tone, —

“What an imbecile that Souday is to come and tell me such things as that after dinner! It is quite enough to upset my digestion!”

The marquis was a sensitive fellow. It seemed to him that after he had risked his life for six months, it was rather a moderate acknowledgment to be called an imbecile by the very man in whose cause he had risked it.

He had something like a hundred louis in his pocket; and he left Blankenbourg that same evening, saying to himself, —

“If I had known I was to be received in this fashion, I would hardly have been at so much pains to come!”

He returned to Holland, and thence passed over to England. There a new phase of the Marquis de Souday's existence began. He was one of those men whom circumstances mould; who are strong or weak, brave or pusillanimous, according to their environment. For six months he had been in the thick of that fearful Vendean epic. He had reddened with his blood the bushes and the soil of Upper and Lower Poitou; he had borne with stoical composure not only the unlucky issue of battle, but all the privations which are the inevitable concomitants of guerilla warfare, — camping in the snow, wandering about without bread or clothing or shelter in the miry forests of La Vendée; nor had he ever had an emotion of regret, or uttered a word of complaint.

And yet, with such a past as his, alone in the vortex of the great city of London, where he strayed sadly about, thinking regretfully of the days of strife and

action, he found himself devoid of courage or firmness or energy in the face of the life of idleness in which he was bored to distraction, and of the poverty which awaited him in his place of exile.

This man, who had defied the attacks of the columns of hell, could not hold his own against the wicked suggestions of idleness. He sought pleasure everywhere and at any price, to fill the void which made itself felt in his life, when he had no longer the chances of a war of extermination to occupy his mind.

The pleasures which the exile required he was too poor to be particular about; and so he gradually lost that air of gentlemanly refinement which the peasant's coat he had worn for more than two months had failed to impair; and with his refinement vanished his cultivated tastes. He compared ale and porter to champagne, and paid his court to the bedizened damsels of the Grosvenor and the Haymarket, — he who had chosen his early flames among duchesses!

It soon came about that his yielding moral principles and the incessant needs of existence led him into expedients which accorded but ill with his reputation. He accepted what he could no longer pay for; he made friends of his boon companions, whose social position was much beneath his own. The result was that his fellow-emigrés kept aloof from him; and in the natural order of things, as he found himself more and more alone, he plunged deeper and deeper into the evil courses upon which he had entered.

He had been leading such a life as we have hinted at for two years, when he chanced to meet in a brothel in the city, of which he was one of the most regular habitués, a young working-girl who had just been enticed from her garret by one of those hideous creatures who

swarm in London by-ways, and produced for the first time at this abode of infamy.

Despite the sad changes which ill fortune had worked in his appearance, the poor child nevertheless detected the traces of his former gentility. She cast herself, weeping bitterly, at the marquis's feet, imploring him to rescue her from the life of shame to which it was proposed to devote her, and for which she was not fitted, having been chaste up to that time.

The maid was fair to look upon, and the marquis proposed to her to share his lot with him. She embraced him, and promised to give him her whole heart and to devote her life to him.

Thus, without the slightest thought of performing a meritorious action, the marquis caused the miscarriage of the speculation founded upon Eva's personal attractions. The unfortunate child's name was Eva.

She kept her word, like the poor, honest girl she was: the marquis was her first and only love.

Indeed, it was a happy moment for both of them. The marquis was beginning to weary of cock-fights and the fumes of bitter beer, of skirmishes with constables, and the chance associates of the public squares. The tender affection of the young girl refreshed his weary heart. Fair as the swans which were the emblem of Great Britain, her native land, the child met all the requirements of M. de Souday's self-love. Little by little he changed his manner of life; and although he did not resume the habits suited to his rank, the life which he led was at least that of an honest man.

He found shelter with Eva in an attic in Piccadilly. The young girl was very clever with her needle, and found employment with a linen-draper. The marquis gave lessons in fencing.

From that moment they lived partly upon the modest avails of the marquis's lessons and Eva's handiwork, but in great measure upon their mutual happiness in an attachment which became sufficiently powerful to cast a glamour over their poverty.

That attachment, however, like all things of earth, wore itself out finally. Happily for Eva, the excitement of the Vendean war, and the unbridled debauchery in the hells of London, had wasted whatever superfluous vigor her lover might have had. He had grown old prematurely.

In short, when the day came that the Marquis de Souday found that his love for Eva was but an extinct fire, or at least a fire which was just on the point of dying, when her kisses failed to arouse an answering flame, habit had taken so firm a hold upon him that, even if he had been inclined to yield to the need of seeking distraction elsewhere, he would have been without the force or courage to break off a connection in which his egoism continued to take satisfaction from day to day.

This *ci-devant* great lord, whose ancestors had for three centuries exercised almost dictatorial jurisdiction in their county, this *ex-brigand* and aide-de-camp of the brigand Charette, lived thus for twelve long years the depressing, miserable, hand-to-mouth existence of an humble wage-earner.

Heaven had long failed to smile upon this unlawful union; but at last the prayers which Eva had uttered for twelve years were hearkened to. She gave birth to twins.

Unhappily she lived only a few hours to taste those joys of maternity which she had so earnestly desired. She fell a speedy victim to the fever incident upon her condition.

Her affection for the marquis was as strong and deep after these twelve years as in the early days of their connection: and yet her passion, great as it was, had not blinded her to the fickleness and selfishness which were her lover's most striking characteristics. Thus she died, distracted on the one hand with grief at having to say adieu forever to him whom she loved so dearly, and on the other, with apprehension for the fate of her two children in his irresponsible hands.

This loss produced in the mind of the Marquis de Souday certain effects which we describe somewhat at length, because they seem to us to afford a faithful picture of the disposition of that individual, who is destined to play an important part in the tale we have to tell.

He began by mourning for his late companion sincerely and in good earnest; for he could but do justice to her qualities, and realize how much happiness he had owed to her affection.

Then, after his first emotions of grief had subsided, he experienced a little of the joy which the school-boy feels upon throwing away his books. Some day or other, he thought, his name, his rank, his illustrious birth might have compelled him to break the bond, and he was not disposed to find fault with Providence for having relieved him of a duty which would have been a bitterly hard one for him.

But the satisfaction due to this reflection was short-lived. Eva's loving devotion to him, and the innumerable little attentions he had received at her hands, had spoiled the marquis; and these same little attentions, when he was deprived of them all at once, seemed to him even more essential than they had formerly seemed pleasant to receive.

The garret, when it no longer had the clear, sweet voice of the English girl to enliven it, became once more in his eyes what it really was, — a wretched dog-kennel. In like manner, when he looked in vain for the silky, blond tresses of his friend upon her pillow, his bed seemed nought but a hole to lie in.

Where should he turn now for the loving caresses and the sweet thoughtfulness with which Eva had enveloped him for twelve years past? Having reached this stage of his loneliness, the marquis realized that he must seek in vain for them. Consequently, he began again bitterly to bemoan the loss of his mistress; and when it became necessary to part from the two little girls, whom he put out to nurse in Yorkshire, his grief called forth demonstrations of affection which deeply moved the peasant woman to whom they were intrusted.

When he was thus severed from everything which bound him to the past, the Marquis de Souday bent beneath the burden of his isolation. He became gloomy and silent; he was disgusted with life; and as his religious faith was not remarkably strong, he would probably have sought oblivion by taking a leap into the Thames, had it not been for the catastrophe of 1814, which occurred just in time to turn his mind away from its sombre preoccupation.

Returning once more to his fatherland, which he had never expected to see again, the Marquis de Souday very naturally presented to Louis XVIII. (at whose hands he had asked nothing during the whole period of his exile) his claim for the price of the blood he had shed for him. But princes seldom need more than one reason for showing themselves ungrateful, and Louis XVIII. had three in the case of his one-time page.

The first was his inconsiderate method of announcing to his Majesty the death of Charette, which had, in fact, deranged the royal digestive apparatus.

The second was his indecorous and hasty departure from Blankenbourg, accompanied, as it was, by certain expressions which were even more indecorous than the departure itself.

The third and last reason, and the most weighty, was the irregularity of his mode of life during his stay in England.

The valor and devotion of the ex-page were extolled in glowing terms; but he was given to understand, very gently, that with such scandalous courses upon his conscience, his claims to public employment could not be admitted.

The king was no longer the absolute master, they told him,—he had to reckon with public opinion; and the reign of immorality and license was to be succeeded by a new, strait-laced *régime*.

They represented to the marquis what a noble thing it would be for him to crown a life of self-abnegation and devotion by sacrificing his ambition to the exigencies of the situation. In short, they induced him to be content with the cross of Saint Louis, the rank and retiring pension of a major, and to eat the king's bread on his estate of Souday,—the only morsel which the poor *émigré* had retained of the immense fortune of his ancestors.

The admirable feature of the marquis's conduct was that all this hypocrisy did not prevent his doing his duty,—that is to say, from turning his back upon his little castle once more when Napoleon accomplished his wonderful return from Elba.

Napoleon vanquished again, once more the Marquis

de Souday re-entered Paris in the suite of the legitimist princes; but on this occasion, with more tact than he had shown in 1814, he limited his demands to the lieutenancy of the wolf-hunt of the arrondissement of Machecoul, which, being an unpaid office, was bestowed upon him with much eagerness.

The marquis, who had been deprived throughout his young manhood of a sport which was an hereditary passion in his family, devoted himself to the hunt with furious ardor. Always melancholy when leading a life of solitude, for which his nature was not made, he had become even more misanthropical as a result of his political disappointments; and he found in this vocation momentary forgetfulness of his bitter memories. Thus it was that the possession of a wolf-hunting establishment, which entitled him to roam at will through the forests which belonged to the State, afforded him more satisfaction than had been his when he received from the hands of the minister his cross of Saint Louis, or his major's pension.

The Marquis de Souday had been living two years in his little château, beating the woods day and night with his six dogs, — beyond which number his very slender income would not allow him to go, — seeing just as much of his neighbors as was necessary to avoid the reputation of being a bear, and thinking as little as he could upon the shame or the glory of the past, when one morning, as he was on his way to explore the northern part of the forest of Machecoul, he met upon the road a peasant woman, carrying a child of three or four years upon each arm.

The marquis recognized the woman, and blushed at the recognition.

It was the Yorkshire nurse, to whom he had forgotten

for thirty-six or thirty-eight months to send the board-money for her two nurslings.

The good woman had betaken herself to London, and very sensibly made inquiries at the French embassy. She reached her goal through the assistance of the French minister, who did not suspect that the Marquis de Souday might not be overjoyed to have his children restored to him.

The remarkable part of it is that the minister did not reason altogether wrong. The little creatures bore so striking a resemblance to poor Eva that the marquis was overcome for a moment. He kissed them with unfeigned affection, gave his gun to the Englishwoman to carry, took the two children in his arms, and returned to the castle with this unlooked-for booty, to the utter stupefaction of the Nantaise cook, who composed his whole establishment, and who overwhelmed him with queries as to his extraordinary find.

This flood of interrogatories alarmed the marquis. He was but thirty-nine years old, and had a vague idea of marrying, considering it his duty to provide against so illustrious a family as his coming to an end in his person; nor, in truth, would he have been sorry to turn over to a wife the household cares, which were extremely distasteful to him.

But the realization of this project would become decidedly difficult if the two little girls were to remain beneath his roof. He understood it, but paid the Englishwoman handsomely, and sent her away the next day. During the night he had formed a resolution which seemed to him to arrange everything satisfactorily.

What was that resolution? We shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWINS.

THE Marquis de Souday went to bed, repeating to himself the old, old axiom,—“the night will bring counsel.”

Relying upon that hope he went to sleep, and in his sleep he dreamed.

He dreamed of the old Vendean wars, of Charette, whose aide-de-camp he had been; and more than all, he dreamed of that gallant farmer's son who had been his own aide-de-camp. He dreamed of Jean Oullier, of whom he had never thought and whom he had never seen since the day when they had separated in the wood of La Chabotière, as Charette lay dying.

As nearly as he could remember, Jean Oullier, before he joined Charette's army, lived in the village of La Chevrolière, near the lake of Grand-Lieu.

The marquis ordered a Machecoul man who ordinarily executed his commissions, to take saddle, and go to La Chevrolière and inquire whether a certain Jean Oullier was still alive and still living in the village.

If he were still alive, and still living in the village, the Machecoul man was directed to deliver to him a letter, of which he was the bearer, and bring him back with him if possible.

If he should be living in the outskirts, the messenger was to seek him out; but if his abode were too far away for that, he was simply to find out just where it was.

If he were dead, he was to come back and say so.

Jean Oullier was not dead, however. Jean Oullier was not in a distant region, nor was he even so far away as the outskirts of La Chevrolière. He was in La Chevrolière itself.

This is what had befallen him after he had parted from the Marquis de Souday.

He had lain hidden in a thicket from which he could see without being seen. He had seen General Travot make Charette his prisoner, and treat him with all the consideration which a man like General Travot would be likely to have for Charette.

But it would seem that that was not all that Jean Oullier wished to see; for when Charette was placed upon a litter and carried away, he still remained in his thicket. To be sure, an officer and guard of twelve men also remained in the forest.

An hour after the guard was stationed, a Vendean peasant passed within ten paces of Jean Oullier, and replied to the challenge of the Blue sentinel with the word "friend," — an extraordinary reply in the mouth of a Royalist peasant addressing Republican soldiers.

Then the peasant exchanged a countersign with the sentinel, who allowed him to pass on. He next approached the officer, who, with an expression of loathing impossible to describe, handed him a purse filled with gold. Thereupon the peasant disappeared.

In all likelihood the officer and his twelve men had been left in the wood for no other purpose than to await this peasant; for he was hardly out of sight when they formed and vanished in their turn.

In all likelihood again, Jean Oullier had seen what he was waiting for; he left his thicket as he had entered it, crawling, — that is to say, got upon his feet, tore the

white cockade from his hat, and with the careless air of a man who has risked his life upon a cast of the dice every day for three years, plunged into the depths of the woods.

That same night he reached La Chevrolière.

He went straight to the spot where he expected to find his house. In its stead he found a blackened, smoking ruin.

He sat upon a rock and wept.

In that house he had left a wife and two children.

But soon Jean Oullier heard a footstep; he raised his head.

A peasant was passing, and Jean recognized him in the darkness.

"Tinguy!" he called.

The peasant approached.

"Who are you," he asked; "who calls me?"

"I am Jean Oullier," was the reply of the Chouan.

"God help you!" exclaimed Tinguy.

He was about to resume his road, when Jean stopped him.

"You must answer my questions," he said.

"Are you a man?"

"Yes."

"All right, then; ask. I will answer."

"My father?"

"Dead."

"My wife?"

"Dead."

"My two children?"

"Dead."

"Thanks."

Jean Oullier sat down again; he shed no more tears. A moment after he fell upon his knees and began to

pray. It was full time, for he was on the point of blaspheming.

He prayed for the dead; then, strengthened by his abiding faith, which gave him the hope of meeting them again some day in a better world, he camped out upon the melancholy ruins.

The next morning, at daybreak, he was at work as calm and resolute as if his father were still guiding the plough, his wife at the fireside, and his children playing before the door.

With his single hand, asking help from no one, he rebuilt his cabin.

He lived there upon his modest daily wage; and he who should have advised Jean Oullier to ask at the hands of the Bourbons a reward for that which, rightly or wrongly, he looked upon as a duty fulfilled, would have run great risk of offending the poor peasant's simple but great-mindedness.

We can understand that being possessed of such a character, Jean Oullier was not slow in responding to the letter of the Marquis de Souday, wherein he called him his old comrade, and begged him to come to the château at once.

He closed the door of his house, put the key in his pocket, and having nobody to notify, as he lived by himself, he set out on the moment.

The messenger offered to give him his horse, or at least to take him up behind; but Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Thank God, I have a good pair of legs," said he.

Laying his hand upon the horse's neck, he signified to him by a sort of gymnastic evolution the gait which he wished him to take. It was a short trot of two leagues an hour.

By nightfall Jean was at the Château de Souday.

The marquis received him with very evident delight; all day long he had been torturing himself with the idea that Jean was either dead or absent. We need not say, perhaps, that it was on his own account, not on Jean's, that he was tortured by the fear that he would fail to materialize; for our readers are forewarned that the Marquis de Souday was slightly selfish.

His first action was to take Jean Oullier aside and make him acquainted with his position and the resulting embarrassment.

Jean, whose children had been slaughtered, could not very well comprehend how a father could voluntarily live apart from his children. However, he accepted the marquis's proposition that he should take them and bring them up until they were old enough to go to a boarding-school.

He agreed to seek out in La Chevrolière, or its neighborhood, some worthy woman who would take a mother's place to them, — if indeed anybody can take a mother's place to an orphan.

Even if the twins had been ugly and unattractive, Jean Oullier would have accepted; but they were so sweet and winning and lovely, their smiles were so engaging, that the good fellow loved them at first sight as such people know how to love.

He declared that their sweet little white and pink faces, and their long, curly locks, recalled to his mind so vividly the angels which used to surround the Madonna of the high altar of Grand-Lieu before they were shattered, that when he first saw them his impulse was to kneel before them.

Well, it was decided that Jean should take the children away with him the next day.

Unfortunately, it had rained incessantly from the time the nurse left the castle until Jean Oullier's arrival.

The marquis, shut up indoors, had begun to be conscious of a decided feeling of *ennui*; and because of that feeling, he called his two daughters and began to play with them. Placing one of them astride his neck, and the other on his back, he ambled around the room on all fours, as the Béarnais used to do, except that he improved upon the amusement which Henri IV. afforded his progeny by imitating with his mouth the blast of a horn and the baying of a whole pack of hounds.

This indoor hunting was exceedingly diverting to the marquis, and it goes without saying that the little ones for their part had never had such sport. Moreover, they had taken a decided liking to the affectionate caresses, accompanied by incessant chattering, which their father had lavished upon them during those hours, with the probable object of putting a quietus upon the rebukes of his conscience for parting from them so soon again after such a long separation.

The two children then displayed a very demonstrative attachment to the marquis, and a degree of gratitude which boded ill for his plans.

At eight in the morning, when the carriage was brought around to the door of the château, and the twins understood that they were to be taken away, they began to shriek in their despair.

Bertha rushed at her father, clasped her arms about one of his legs, and clinging to the gaiter of the gentleman who had given her so many sweeties and who played horses so beautifully, she succeeded in entangling her hands in such fashion that the poor marquis

was afraid of bruising them if he tried to loosen her hold.

As for Mary, she was sitting upon the steps, contenting herself with weeping; but her sobs were so heartbreaking that Jean Oullier felt even more touched by her mute grief than by the noisier despair of her sister.

The marquis exerted his eloquence to the utmost to persuade the poor creatures that if they would but go away in the carriage they would have more dainties and more sport than if they stayed with him; but the more he talked, the harder did Mary weep, and the more did Bertha stamp her little feet and cling close to him in her rage.

The marquis began to lose his temper; and, as he saw that persuasion was of no avail, was about to use force, when, raising his eyes, his glance fell upon Jean Oullier.

Two great tears were rolling down the peasant's bronzed cheeks, and losing themselves in the thick fringe of red whiskers which enclosed his face like a frame. These tears were at once a prayer to the marquis and a rebuke to the father.

M. de Souday made a sign to Jean to have the horse taken out: and while Bertha, who understood the sign, was dancing about for joy, he whispered in the peasant's ear, —

“ You can go to-morrow as well.”

Meanwhile, as it was a beautiful day, the marquis thought he would take advantage of Jean Oullier's presence to have him for a companion in the chase. So he led him to his dressing-room to help him to find a hunting-costume.

The peasant was appalled by the frightful lack of

order in that small apartment, and the marquis took occasion to confide the balance of his troubles to him, complaining about his female Master Jacques, who, although she was well enough in her kitchen, was inconceivably inefficient in all other household matters, and particularly in relation to looking after the toilet of her master.

They were more than ten minutes in finding a waistcoat which was not entirely without buttons, or a pair of breeches which was not so ripped and torn as to be unfit to wear.

At last they made out, however.

Master of wolf-hounds though he was, the marquis was too poor to afford the luxury of a whipper-in; and he guided the motions of his little pack himself. Compelled thus to divide his attention between guarding against false scents and looking after the shooting, it seldom happened that he did not return home in a state of exhaustion.

With Jean Oullier it was quite a different matter. The sturdy peasant, in the very prime of life, climbed the steepest acclivities in the forest with the strength and agility of a kid; he leaped over the bushes when it seemed to him too far around them; and, thanks to his muscles of steel, he never left the dogs for one moment. In fact, on two or three occasions he supported them so handily that the boar they were hunting realized that he could not hope to shake off his foes by flight, and ended by waiting for them and standing at bay in a thicket, where the marquis had the great joy of killing him, *au ferme*, which had never happened to him before.

He returned to the castle in a most cheerful and exultant frame of mind, thanking Jean Oullier heartily for the fine day's sport he had had.

During dinner he was in delightful humor, and invented new games to bring the little girls into accord with him.

At night, when he went into his dressing-room, he found Jean sitting in a corner with his legs crossed, after the manner of Turks or tailors. The good fellow had a mountain of old clothes in front of him, and held in his hands an old pair of velvet breeches, in and out of which his needle was going fiercely enough.

"What the devil are you doing there?" the marquis exclaimed.

"The winters are cold in this flat country, especially when the wind blows from the sea; and when I am at home again my legs will ache with the cold, simply from thinking how the north wind will blow in upon yours through such a hole as that," Jean replied, pointing out to his master a yawning chasm, reaching from the knee to the waist, in the garment upon which he was at work.

"Aha, so you're a tailor, are you!" said the marquis.

"Alas!" was Jean's reply, "must one not know a little of everything after living alone for twenty years? And then, too, one is never at a loss after serving in the army."

"Indeed! but did I not do that, too?" asked the marquis.

"No; you were an officer, and that's quite another matter."

The marquis looked admiringly at Jean Oullier, then went to bed and to sleep, and snored lustily, without disturbing the old Chouan at his task in the least.

In the middle of the night the marquis awoke.

Jean was still working away. The huge pile of clothes had not grown perceptibly less.

"Why, you will not get through with all that, even if you work till daybreak, my poor Jean!" the marquis said.

"Alas! I am much afraid not."

"Come, go to bed, old comrade; you shall not leave me until all this chaos has been reduced to something like order, and we will hunt again to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW JEAN OULLIER, AFTER COMING TO THE CHÂTEAU FOR AN HOUR ONLY, WOULD BE THERE STILL, EXCEPT THAT HE AND THE MARQUIS HAVE BEEN DEAD TEN YEARS.

IN the morning, before going out to the chase, the Marquis de Souday thought he would go and kiss his children. Consequently he went up to their bed-room, and was vastly amazed to find the omnipresent Jean Oullier there before him, washing the little maids' faces with the conscientious persistence of the best of governesses.

Indeed the poor fellow, who was reminded by this occupation of the little ones he had lost, seemed to be quite content.

The admiration of the Marquis became respect.

For a week, hunting expeditions succeeded one another without interruption, each more satisfactory and more successful than the last.

During that week Jean Oullier was whipper-in and house-steward by turns; and in the latter capacity, he was no sooner in the house than he was at work again freshening up his master's wardrobe; and yet he found time to put the whole establishment in order from top to bottom.

The marquis, far from desiring now to hasten his departure, shuddered at the thought that he would ever be obliged to part with so invaluable a retainer.

From morning till night, sometimes indeed from night till morning, he would try to decide which of the Vendean's many good qualities touched him most deeply.

Jean Oullier had the scent of a bloodhound for detecting the point where the game had entered the wood, by the broken brambles, or the traces upon the dew-laden grass. Even on the dry and rocky paths of Machecoul, Bourgneuf, and Aigrefeuille he could tell without hesitation the age and sex of a boar whose tracks were hardly discernible.

Never had mounted huntsman supported his hounds so cleverly as Jean Oullier would do, mounted on his two long legs. And when the little pack was so done up with fatigue that it must be allowed a day's rest, he was without a rival in picking out spots where woodcock abounded, and taking his master to them.

"Oh, to the devil with marrying!" the marquis would burst out sometimes, when he seemed to be thinking of something different. "What have I to do with such a state, in which I have seen the best people toiling away for dear life? *Par la Mort-Dieu!* I am no longer a young man: I am close upon forty; I have passed the age of illusions, and I do not expect to fascinate anybody with my personal charms. I cannot hope for any better fate than to tempt some fat old dowager with my three thousand livres income, half of which dies with me. I shall find myself saddled with a grumbling, crotchety, bad tempered Marquise de Souday, who may perhaps put a stop to my hunting, in which good Jean supports me so well, and who most assuredly will not manage the household any better than he does. And yet," he would continue, rising to his full height, "is this a time when illustrious families can be allowed to die out, natural props of the monarchy as they are?"

Would it not be a sweet thing to me to see my son restore the grandeur of my house? While on the other hand, what will be thought of me, who have never had a wife, — a legitimate one, that is to say? What will my neighbors have to say of the presence of these two small creatures in my house?"

These reflections, when they passed through his mind, — it generally happened on rainy days when the bad weather prevented him from following his favorite sport, — these reflections sometimes caused the Marquis de Souday serious perplexity. He evaded it, as all undecided, vacillating characters evade such dilemmas, by postponing a decision.

Bertha and Mary in 1831 were seventeen years old, and the provisional arrangement still endured. In very truth, incredible as it seems, the Marquis de Souday had not even then definitely decided upon keeping his daughters with him.

Jean Oullier, who had hung the key of his house at *La Chevrolière* upon a nail, had never had occasion to take it down.

He had waited patiently for his master to order him back to his own fireside; but inasmuch as, since his arrival at the *château*, that mansion had become spotlessly neat and clean; as the marquis had never once had reason to mourn over the absence of buttons; as his hunting-boots were also beautifully greased; as the guns were kept in as fine condition as in the best gunsmith's shop at *Nantes*; as Jean Oullier, by dint of certain coercive expedients which he had learned from one of his mates in the *brigand* army, had gradually brought the cook to abandon her habit of visiting her ill-humor upon her master; as the dogs were always in prime condition, with glossy coats, neither too fat nor too lean,

and ready for a fast run of eight or ten hours four times a week, and generally to come in fresh at the death; as the charming prattle of the children and their very demonstrative affection broke the monotony of his existence; as his long talks with Jean Oullier about the old war which had come to be little more than a tradition, going back thirty-five or six years, also gave variety to his life, and shortened the long evenings and rainy days; the marquis, finding once more the assiduous attention, the pleasant and tranquil happiness which he had enjoyed with poor Eva, in combination with the intoxicating excitement of the chase, — the marquis, we say, had postponed from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the hour of separation.

As for Jean Oullier, he had motives of his own for doing nothing to hasten the long-postponed decision. He was not only a brave man, but he was a kind, worthy fellow as well.

As we have said above, he had at once conceived a very warm affection for Bertha and Mary; that affection, in his heart, which still mourned the loss of his own little ones, had soon become tender fondness, and that fondness in due time had grown into almost fanatical adoration. He had not at first very clearly comprehended the distinction which the marquis had in his mind between their position and that of the legitimate children of such union as he might enter into with a view to the perpetuation of his name. In Lower Poitou, when an honest girl has been betrayed, only one means of reparation is acknowledged, — to wit, marriage. It seemed no more than fair to Jean Oullier that his master should at least acknowledge the paternity which the dying Eva had bequeathed to him, since it was not in his power to legalize their liaison. So, after he had

been at the château two or three months, and his reflections on the subject had been duly weighed by his mind, and confirmed by his heart, the Vendean would have taken in very bad part an order to depart; and even his respect for M. de Souday would not have prevented him, in that extremity, from giving full vent to his ideas.

Fortunately the marquis did not communicate to his servant the vacillations of his mind, so that Jean Oullier might well look upon the provisional arrangement as a definitive one, and believe that the marquis considered the continued presence of his daughters at the château as their right, and that he was in duty bound to allow them to remain.

At the moment at which we bring these preliminary remarks, a little tedious perhaps, to a close, Bertha and Mary were between seventeen and eighteen.

The pure blood of the Marquises de Souday mingled with the vigorous blood of the plebeian Saxon girl, had produced superb results. Eva's children were two splendid young girls, with refined and delicate features, slim and graceful figures, and noble and distinguished bearing.

They resembled one another as twins always do, although Bertha was dark like her father, and Mary light like her mother.

Unfortunately the education which these two fair creatures had received had been largely directed toward the development of their physical strength without sufficient regard to the accomplishments befitting their sex.

Living from day to day in close companionship with their father, and exposed to the influence of his heedless enjoyment of the present without thought of the future, it could not well be otherwise.

Jean Oullier had been the real tutor of Eva's children, as he had been the only governess they had ever known.

The honest Vendean had taught them all that he knew, — to read and write and cipher, and to pray to God and the Virgin with deep and loving fervor; then he had taught them to roam through the woods, to scale cliffs, to force their way through thickets of thorn and brier, all without weariness, and without a sign of fear or weakness; to stay the flight of a bird, or the course of a hare, with a bullet; and to ride bareback the unmanageable horses of Mellerault, which roam over their moors and heaths as wild and free as the mustangs of the Gauchos over their pampas.

The Marquis de Souday had seen it all without feeling the least inclination to impart any other direction to his daughters' education, and without any thought of moderating the enjoyment they took in these masculine pursuits; the worthy gentleman was only too happy to find in them sturdy hunting-companions, who combined with a tender regard for their father an eager animation and enthusiastic ardor, which increased twofold the pleasure of all his excursions after they began to share them.

To be perfectly fair, however, we ought to say that the marquis had added some instruction of his own to Jean Oullier's lessons.

When Bertha and Mary reached the age of fourteen, and began to accompany their father on his hunting trips, the infantile amusements which formerly occupied the evenings at the château, lost all their charm.

Then, in order to fill the void which resulted, the marquis taught Bertha and Mary to play whist.

By their own unaided exertions, meanwhile, the children had done all that they could to educate their

minds, as Jean Oullier had educated their bodies; while playing at hide-and-seek in the château they had discovered a room which had not been opened for thirty years in all probability.

It was the library, and there they found something like a thousand volumes.

Each had selected from the shelves such works as suited her taste. The gentle, sentimentally inclined Mary had given the preference to romances, while the more positive and vehement Bertha inclined to history.

Then each would share her information with the other; Bertha, after hearing from Mary's lips the exploits of "Amadis," and the story of "Paul and Virginia," would tell her what she herself had read in the pages of Mézeray and Velly.

From this desultory reading it resulted that the two young girls acquired some very erroneous ideas on the subject of life in general, and the customs and demands of a world which they had never seen, and of which they had almost never heard.

At the time of their first communion, the curé of Machecoul, who loved them for their piety and the goodness of their hearts, ventured to make some observations on the strange existence which lay before them, as the sequel to their being thus reared at haphazard; but his friendly remonstrances glanced off the selfish indifference of the Marquis de Souday.

So the method of education we have described had continued; and from that method had resulted a mode of life which had — thanks to their false position — given Bertha and her sister a very bad reputation throughout the neighborhood.

In fact the Marquis de Souday was surrounded by petty lordlings who were very envious of his illustrious

name, and who only asked for an opportunity to repay the disdainful treatment which their ancestors probably had received at the hands of his. So when it was found that he had beneath his roof the offspring of an illegitimate connection and that he called them his daughters, they began to publish, with beat of drum, malicious reports of the life he had led at London; they exaggerated his misdeeds; they made of poor Eva, who had been miraculously preserved from ruin, a mere girl of the street; and gradually the bumpkins of Beauvoir, Saint Léger, Bourgneuf, Saint Philbert, and Grand-Lieu turned their backs on the marquis, on the pretext that he was a disgrace to the nobility, of which they were very good to be so careful, considering the plebeian origin of most of them.

It soon ceased to be the men alone who disapproved the present conduct of the Marquis de Souday, and slandered his past; the beauty of the two girls caused all the mothers and daughters for ten leagues around to take arms against them, and that was a much more serious matter.

If Bertha and Mary had been ugly to look upon, the hearts of these charitable ladies and pious misses would naturally have been inclined to Christian indulgence, and they might even have forgiven the poor devil of a chatelain his irregular paternity; but there was no way of reconciling themselves to the sight of these two black sheep, by favor of their distinguished and noble carriage, and their charms of person, riding roughshod over the best born young ladies of the neighborhood.

Such insolent airs deserved neither mercy nor pity.

The indignant feeling against the poor children was so general that even though they had left not the slightest opening for slander and backbiting, those two

vultures would still have assailed them; therefore we can imagine what was likely to be, and actually was, the result of the eccentric, masculine habits of the two sisters.

Soon there was a general, shocked hue and cry, which extended from the department of Loire-Inférieure to the departments of La Vendée and Maine-et-Loire. Had it not been for the ocean which washes the shores of Loire-Inférieure, their unsavory reputation would certainly have spread to the west as thoroughly as it did to the south and east.

Bourgeois and gentle, city-bred and bumpkin, all took a hand in spreading it.

Young people who had hardly met Mary and Bertha, who had hardly seen them, spoke of them with a conceited smile, weighted with hopes for the future when it was not weighted with memories of the past.

Dowagers crossed themselves when they pronounced their names, and governesses threatened their small charges with them when they were naughty.

The most indulgent confined themselves to attributing to the twins the three virtues of Harlequin, which are generally considered to belong to the disciples of Saint Hubert, whose tastes they affected: love, that is to say, gambling, and wine; but others declared, with sober face, that the little castle of Souday was every evening the scene of wild orgies, which were paralleled only in the traditions of the Regency; some romantic creatures even went so far as to insist that one of the little towers, which were given over to the billing and cooing of a score of pigeons, had witnessed a repetition of the scenes enacted in the famous Tour de Nesle of licentious and homicidal memory.

In short, they told so many wicked tales about Bertha

and Mary that, although their lives had hitherto been, and still were, absolutely pure, and their actions absolutely innocent, they had become objects of horror throughout the region.

Through the medium of the servants of the neighboring châteaux, and of the workmen who had business relations with the *bourgeoisie*, through the very people whom they employed or to whom they showed kindness, this detestation spread among the common people; so that, with the exception of some poor blind people, and some few helpless old women, whom the orphans assisted directly, the whole population in blouses and brogans served as an echo of the absurd tales invented by their betters; and there was not a butcher or shoemaker in Machecoul, not a husbandman in Saint Philbert or Argrefeuille, who would not have thought it a disgrace to take off his hat to them.

At last the peasants had bestowed a sobriquet upon Bertha and Mary, and that sobriquet of the humblest origin had been received with delight in the higher circles as characterizing perfectly the character of the young girls, and the irregular conduct ascribed to them.

They called them the "She-Wolves of Machecoul."

CHAPTER V.

A LITTER OF YOUNG WOLVES.

THE Marquis de Souday was utterly indifferent to these manifestations of public animadversion: more than that, he did not even seem to suspect that it existed. When he noticed that the visits which he felt obliged to make to his neighbors, few and far between as they were, were not returned, he rubbed his hands gleefully, considering himself thereby relieved from the further performance of a task which was odious to him, and which he never undertook except when he was absolutely driven to it by his daughters or by Jean Oullier.

Once in a while some whisper of the slanders that were in circulation about Bertha and Mary came to his ears from this quarter or that; but he was so happy and contented with his factotum, his daughters, and his dogs, that he was afraid of disturbing his peace of mind by taking the least notice of such absurd reports. So that he continued to course his hares every day, to run down a boar on great occasions, and to play whist every evening with his poor slandered girls.

Jean Oullier was far from being as philosophical as his master; but it should be said that he learned much more of the current gossip, his position in life inspiring much less awe.

His fondness for the young ladies amounted to fanaticism; he passed his whole time gazing at them, whether they were sitting in the salon of the château, smiling

brightly, or were galloping along at his side, leaning forward over their horses' necks, with glistening eyes, animated features, their lovely hair waving in the wind beneath their old broad-brimmed hats with waving plumes. As he saw how proud they were of their skill and at the same time so thoughtful and loving to their father and to him, he reflected that he had had a large share in the development of the noble creatures, and wondered why the whole world did not kneel at their feet.

Thus it happened that the unlucky wight who first ventured to speak to him of the rumors which were flooding the country-side, was brought to book so sharply that others were deterred; but after all, being the real father of Bertha and Mary, in interest and affection, Jean did not need that any one should tell him in words his or her opinion of the two objects of his adoration.

In a smile, a look, a gesture, or a sign he could divine each person's unkind thoughts with an unerring accuracy which made him really unhappy.

The contempt which rich and poor alike took no pains to conceal, affected him deeply. If he had yielded to the impulse of his hot blood, he would have picked a quarrel with every face which seemed to him to be lacking in respect, and would have disciplined some with a pommelling, and suggested single combat to others; but his common-sense taught him that Bertha and Mary needed to be set right by other means than that, and that blows given or received would prove absolutely nothing in their justification. He feared moreover, — and it was the great dread of his life, — that, as the result of one of the scenes he would so gladly have provoked, the young girls would learn the state of public feeling concerning themselves.

So poor Jean Oullier bent his neck beneath this unmerited reprobation; and bitter tears and fervent prayers to God, the supreme repairer of human wrongs and injustice, were the only indications of his unhappiness. He became a confirmed misanthrope. Seeing around him none but the enemies of his beloved children, he could do nothing else than hate all mankind; and he prepared to return evil for evil, dreaming of impending revolution.

The revolution of 1830 came and went without affording Jean an opportunity for putting his hostile designs in execution, although he had hoped to profit by it.

But the war of barricades was roaring every day in the streets of Paris, and might very well, when the time was ripe, overflow into the provinces; so he bided his time.

Now, one fine morning in September, the Marquis de Souday and his daughters, Jean Oullier, and the pack — which had not increased in numbers, although it had been renewed several times since the marquis took charge of it — were hunting in the forest of Machecoul.

It was a day which the marquis had been impatiently awaiting for three months, in the expectation of great sport; the business in hand was to run down a litter of wolf-cubs, whose lair Jean had discovered before their eyes were opened, and which since then he had sedulously looked after and coddled like the excellent whipper-in that he was.

This last phrase needs perhaps a little explication for those of our readers who are not familiar with the noble art of venery.

When he was a mere boy, the Duc de Biron, who was decapitated in 1602 by order of Henri IV., said one day to his father.

“Give me fifty cavalrymen, and I will wipe out those two hundred men, who are out on a foraging expedi-

tion; when they are taken, the town will be forced to surrender."

"And what then?"

"Why, then the town will have surrendered."

"And the king will have no further need of us! We must remain *necessary* to him, you fool!"

The two hundred foragers were not slain, the town was not taken, and Biron and his son remained *necessary*; that is to say, being necessary they remained in favor, and in the king's pay.

It is with the wolves as it was with the foragers whom Biron's father spared. If there were no wolves, there would be no need of a leader of the wolf-hunt.

Thus we ought to pardon Jean Oullier, the corporal of the wolf-hunt, for having shown some kind attention to the wolf's nurselings, and for not having exterminated them and their mother with the same pitilessness which he would have exhibited toward an old wolf of the masculine gender.

That is not all.

It is impracticable to hunt an old wolf if he is allowed to run, and tiresome and monotonous to kill them *en battue*, while a chase after a cub of five to seven months is easy, pleasant, and often amusing.

So it was that, in order to provide diversion for his master's leisure moments, Jean Oullier, when he discovered the litter, had taken great care not to disturb or frighten the mother; he had paid no attention to the loss of a few sheep in the vicinity, which she had shared with her little ones. During their infancy he had visited them with touching solicitude, to make sure that no one had laid an impious hand upon them; and was indeed joyous, upon my word, on the day when he found the lair empty, and knew that the mother-wolf had taken them off with her on her travels.

At last he decided that they were sufficiently mature for his purposes, located them within a space containing some hundreds of hectares, and uncoupled the marquis's dogs upon one of them.

The poor little whelp, who had no idea of the meaning of all the baying and blowing of horns, lost his head; he immediately left the enclosure where something might have turned up to save his skin, and leaving his mother and brothers there, he succeeded in gaining another cover, where he kept out of the way for half an hour, running round and round like a hare; then, tired out by the mad pace, which he was not accustomed to, and feeling his legs give way under him, he coolly sat down upon his haunches and waited.

He was not kept long in suspense as to what was wanted of him; for Domino the leader of the marquis's pack, a Vendean cur with stiff, grizzly coat, arrived upon the scene almost immediately, and broke his neck with one shake of his jaws.

Jean Oullier called off the dogs, put them in leash again, and ten minutes later one of the brothers of the deceased was on his feet and the pack hot on his trail.

This little fellow was better advised and did not leave the neighborhood; and by dint of frequent diversions, caused sometimes by the other whelps, and sometimes by the mother, who freely offered herself to the dogs, the moment of his demise was retarded. But Jean knew his trade too well to allow success to be endangered by such mistakes; as soon as the trail showed the firm and decided marks which meant that they were made by an old wolf, he would call off the dogs, take them back to the place where they had gone wrong, and start them again on the right track.

At last, pressed too close by his tormentors, the poor

cub tried a new dodge; he doubled on his tracks, and trotted innocently out of the wood into the midst of the marquis and his daughters. Surprised, and losing his head, he tried to slink off between the legs of the horses; but M. de Souday, leaning down over the neck of his mount, quickly seized him by the tail, and threw him to the dogs, who were close upon his heels.

These two successful drawings had prodigiously amused the lord of Souday, and he did not propose to stop there. He discussed with Jean Oullier the question whether they had best retrace their steps, or let the dogs go again, it being probable that the balance of the cubs were on their feet.

But the mother-wolf, who probably suspected the schemes which were being formed against her remaining offspring, crossed the path not ten feet from the dogs, when Jean and the marquis were at the height of their discussion.

At sight of the animal, the little pack, which they had neglected to couple up again, gave one yelp in concert, and tore after her in a frenzy of excitement.

Shouts, desperate yells, blows of the whip, availed not to hold them back, or check their headlong rush.

Jean Oullier put his best foot forward to overtake them; the marquis and his daughters put their horses to the gallop with the same end in view. But it was no longer a timid, hesitating whelp which the dogs had in front of them: it was a bold, strong, enterprising animal, who kept on her way with as much assurance as if her stronghold was within sight, going straight ahead, heedless of the cliffs, valleys, mountains, or torrents which beset her path; and this, too, without a symptom of fear or undue haste, surrounded now and then by the

little band which was pursuing her, trotting calmly along in the midst of the dogs, and dominating them by threatening sidelong glances, and above all by the significant movement of her formidable jaws.

The wolf, after traversing the forest for three-fourths of its length, debouched into the open, as if she were making for the forest of Grand'Landé.

Jean Oullier kept well up with her, and, thanks to the strength and elasticity of his legs, was within three or four hundred feet of his dogs. The marquis and his daughters, forced by the precipices to follow the winding course of the paths were considerably behind.

When they came to the edge of the wood, and had ascended the hill which overlooks the little village of La Marne, they saw, half a league ahead of them, between Machecoul and La Brillardière, among the furze bushes which are scattered between that village and La Jacquelerie, Jean Oullier, his dogs, and his wolf, still proceeding at the same gait, and following a straight line in the same relative positions.

The success of the first two attempts, and the fast pace, had warmed up the Marquis de Souday's blood.

"*Mordieu!*" he exclaimed, "I would give ten days of my life to be half-way between Saint Étienne de Mer-morte and La Guimarière at this moment, so that I could put a bullet into that infernal old beast!"

"She is surely going to take to the forest of Grand'Landé," said Mary.

"Yes," said Bertha; "but it is equally certain that she will return to her whelps as soon as the dogs let her alone; she can't keep this up forever."

"It would be better, I think, to return to the place where they are," rejoined Mary. "Remember, father, how it was last year, when we chased a great wolf

which led us a fine rig for ten hours and fifteen leagues, and all for nothing; so that we went home with foundered horses, lame dogs, and the shame of having lost our quarry."

"Ta, ta, ta!" said the marquis; "your wolf was not this she-wolf of ours. Go back to the whelps if you choose, young women; I propose to support the dogs. *Par la corbleu!* it shall not be said that I turned up missing at a tally-ho."

"We will go where you go, father," said the two girls with one voice.

"Very well, then, forward!" cried the marquis, accompanying his words with vigorous digs of his spurs, and rushing his horse down the slope.

The road which he had taken was very stony, and intersected by those impassable by-paths, of which Lower Poitou religiously preserves the tradition. Every moment or two the horses stumbled; at every step they would have fallen, had they not been held up by strong and practised hands; and they found it impossible, by taking any cross-road whatsoever, to reach the forest of Grand'Lande in advance of the chase.

M. de Souday, being better mounted than his daughters, and able to urge his beast ahead more rapidly than they could do, had gained some hundreds of feet upon them; annoyed by the difficulties of the road, and perceiving an open field at one side, he made for it, and without taking the trouble to notify his daughters, he galloped across the field.

Bertha and Mary, supposing that they were still following their father, kept on their perilous way along the deserted road.

For nearly a quarter of an hour they had been galloping along, separated from their father, when they found

themselves in a spot where the road was closely hemmed in by two sharp declivities, and bordered by high hedges, the branches of which met above their heads; they suddenly stopped, thinking that they could hear the familiar yelping of their dogs at a short distance.

Almost at the same instant the report of a gun rang out a few steps away, and a large hare, with bloody, hanging ears, leaped out of the hedge, and ran along the road, while furious shouts of "After her, dogs! after her! tally-ho! tally-ho!" were heard from the field which overlooked the narrow path.

The sisters thought they must have fallen in with the hunt of one of their neighbors, and were on the point of leaving the spot, when they saw, at the place where the hare had forced her way through, Rustaud, one of their father's dogs, dart through the hedge, followed by Faraud, Bellaude, Domino, and Fanfare, all in rapid succession, all in full cry after the wretched hare, just as if they had not made the acquaintance of nobler game that day.

But the tail of the sixth dog was hardly clear of the narrow opening when its place was taken by a human head.

This head showed the features of a pale, excited young man, with wild eyes and disordered hair, making superhuman efforts to force his body through the small hole after his head, and shouting, amid his struggles with the thorns and briars, "tally-ho!" in the same voice which Bertha and Mary had heard after the report, a few moments before.

CHAPTER VI.

A WOUNDED HARE.

IN the hedges of Lower Poitou — fashioned somewhat like the Breton hedges, of staddles bent and twisted together — it does not follow that because a hare has passed through, or because six dogs have passed through in pursuit of the hare, that the aperture which has given them passage is capable of being used as a *porte-cochère*; and so the unfortunate youth, caught as if in the window of a guillotine, pushed and struggled and contorted himself, and tore his hands and face with the thorns, to no purpose: he could not make an inch of progress.

However, the young Nimrod did not lose his courage. He was struggling away desperately, when ringing peals of laughter suddenly put an end to his absorption.

He turned his head and saw the two Amazons, leaning upon their horses' necks, and making no pretense of concealing their amusement, nor the cause of it.

Bitterly ashamed to have given occasion for such inordinate mirth to two pretty girls, and realizing to the full the absurdity of his position, the youth — he seemed hardly twenty — tried to retreat; but it was written that the untoward hedge should be fatal even to his hopes of withdrawing successfully. The thorns had taken such a firm hold of his clothes, and the branches had become so entangled with his pockets, that he found it impossible to go back; so he remained, stuck in the hedge as in a bear-trap, and his second misfortune rendered the merri-

ment of the two spectators almost hysterical. Then the poor boy ceased to exert the well-directed energy which he had exerted in the first place; and renewed his efforts to release himself with a sort of blind rage and fury; in this last supreme struggle his face assumed such an agonized expression that Mary felt touched by it.

"Let's be quiet, Bertha," she said; "you see how we wound him."

"Indeed, yes," said Bertha; "but what can I do? It's too much for me."

Without ceasing to laugh, she leaped lightly to the ground, and ran to help the poor boy.

"Monsieur," said she, "I think that a little assistance would not come amiss to you in getting out of here; will you accept the help which my sister and I are ready to offer?"

But the uproarious laughter of the young ladies had wounded the self-esteem of him to whom her remark was addressed more than the thorns had torn his skin; so that courteous as Bertha's words were, they did not make the wretched prisoner forget the mockery of which he had been the object.

So he continued to hold his peace, and as if he had thoroughly determined to extricate himself without anybody's assistance, he made one more attempt.

He rose upon his toes, and tried to move forward, imparting to the anterior portion of his body the diagonal movement which enables animals of the serpent variety to travel; unfortunately, as he executed this movement his forehead came violently in contact with the end of a branch of wild apple, which the hedge-bill of the man who made the hedge had left with a sharp edge. It cut the skin as the keenest razor would have done; the young man felt that he was seriously wounded,

and uttered a cry of pain, while the blood flowing freely, covered his whole face.

When they saw this mishap, of which they were, though involuntarily, the cause, the sisters ran quickly to the young man, seized him by the shoulders, and pulling together, with a strength of arm not commonly met with among women, succeeded in dragging him out of the hedge and seating him upon the turf. Not realizing the trifling character of the wound, and judging it only by appearance, Mary turned pale, and trembled, while Bertha, less impressionable than her sister, did not lose her head for a second.

"Run to that stream," she said to Mary, "and wet your handkerchief, so that we may wipe away the blood which is blinding the poor fellow."

While Mary was doing as she directed, she turned to the young man:—

"Are you suffering much, monsieur?" she asked.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," he replied; "but so many things are in my mind at this moment that I have n't a clear idea whether the pain I feel is without or within my head."

Thereupon he burst into a fit of sobbing, which he had been holding back with great difficulty.

"Oh," he cried, "the good God is punishing me for disobeying mamma!"

Although he who spoke thus was still very young,—we have said that he had just attained his twentieth year,—there was something so childish in the words he uttered a babyish accent which formed such an absurd contrast to his manly figure and his hunting outfit, that despite the compassionate feeling aroused by his wound, the two girls could not restrain a fresh outbreak of mirth.

The poor boy cast a reproachful and imploring glance upon them, while two great tears made their appearance in his eyes; at the same time he impatiently snatched away the handkerchief wet with fresh water, which Mary had laid upon his forehead.

"Why do you do that, pray?" asked Bertha.

"Leave me!" cried the youth. "I am not at all disposed to receive attentions which I am made to pay for by enduring your mockery. Oh, how I repent now that I did not follow my first impulse, and make escape at the risk of wounding myself a hundred times more severely!"

"Very good; but since you were sensible enough to do nothing of the kind," rejoined Mary, "be sensible enough now to let me replace this bandage on your forehead."

As she spoke, the young girl picked up the handkerchief and approached the unfortunate youth with an expression of such deep interest that he, with a shake of the head that signified depression rather than refusal, replied,—

"Do as you please, mademoiselle."

"Oho!" exclaimed Bertha, who had lost none of the young man's changes of expression, "for a bold huntsman you are rather sensitive, my dear monsieur."

"In the first place, mademoiselle, I am not a huntsman; and after what has happened to me, I am less than ever disposed to become one."

"It's my turn to beg pardon," retorted Bertha, in the same tone of raillery which had so disturbed the young man, "and I do so; but judging from the excited fashion in which you gave battle to the thorns and briars, and especially from the ardor with which you urged our dogs on, I was quite justified in supposing

that you were at least an aspirant to the title of huntsman."

"Oh, no, mademoiselle; I simply yielded to an impulse which I can't understand, now that my blood is cool; and I realize how nearly right my mother was in applying the terms absurd and barbarous to this amusement, which consists in deriving pleasure and satisfying one's vanity from the suffering and death of a poor, helpless animal."

"Take care, my dear sir!" said Bertha; "for in our eyes, who are absurd and barbarous enough to enjoy this sport, you are much like the fox in the fable."

At this moment Mary, who had been to wet her handkerchief again in the brook, stooped to bind it around the youth's forehead.

But he pushed her away.

"In Heaven's name, mademoiselle," he cried, "have done with your attentions! Don't you see that your sister is still making fun of me?"

"Oh, come now, I beg," said Mary, in her sweetest voice.

But he did not yield to its gentle accents, and rose to a kneeling posture, with the evident intention of taking his leave.

His obstinacy, which was rather that of a child than a man, exasperated quick-tempered Bertha; and her annoyance, although inspired by a very worthy and humane sentiment, was expressed, nevertheless, somewhat too energetically for her sex.

"*Morbleu!*" she exclaimed, just as her father might have done under similar circumstances, "this wretched little fellow won't listen to reason, will he? Do you attend to binding up his head, Mary; I am going to hold his hands, and the deuce take me if he stirs an inch!"

She was as good as her word, and grasped the wounded man's wrists with a strength of muscle which mocked at all his efforts to loosen her hold; and thus succeeded in making Mary's task of binding the handkerchief firmly upon the wound very easy, and it was soon accomplished.

When she had completed the operation, with a skill that would have done credit to a pupil of Dupuytren or Jobert, Bertha again addressed her patient:—

"Now, monsieur," said she, "you are almost in condition to go home; so you may return to your first plan, and turn on your heel without even thanking us. You are free."

But, notwithstanding this permission, the young man stood like a statue, apparently disinclined to avail himself of his liberty.

He seemed both prodigiously surprised and deeply humiliated, to think that he had shown himself so weak, and had fallen into the hands of two such strong-minded young women. His looks wandered from Bertha to Mary, and from Mary to Bertha, and he could think of no reply to make to them.

At last he saw no other way out of his embarrassment than to hide his face in his hands.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Mary, uneasily; "are you ill?"

The young fellow made no reply.

Bertha gently removed his hands from his face, and when she saw that he was weeping, became at once as gentle and as sympathetic as her sister.

"You must be more seriously wounded than you appear to be, and must be suffering a great deal, that you weep thus," she said. "If that is the case, take my horse, or my sister's, and she and I will see you safely home."

But the young man shook his head in a very decided negative.

"Come, come," said Bertha; "enough of this child's play! We have offended you; but could we imagine that we should find the skin of a young girl under your hunting-waistcoat? However that may be, we have done wrong; we admit it, and offer you our apologies. Perhaps you don't consider that we have satisfied all the demands of politeness; but you must attribute our shortcomings to the peculiarity of the situation, and say to yourself that sincerity is all that can be expected from two girls who are so disgraced in the sight of heaven as to spend all their time in that absurd recreation which has the ill luck to displease Madame your mother. Come, do you bear any malice?"

"No, mademoiselle," replied the young man; "my ill-humor is all directed against myself."

"Why so?"

"I hardly know what to say. Perhaps I am ashamed that I, a grown man, have shown myself weaker than you; perhaps I am simply oppressed by the bare idea of returning home. What *can* I say to my mother to account for this wound?"

The girls looked at each other; they, women as they were, would not have been worried for so slight a matter. This time, however, they refrained from laughter, great as the temptation was, seeing how sensitive and nervous a character they had to deal with.

"Very well," said Bertha; "if you bear no malice, give me your hand and let us part as good friends, though our friendship is not of long standing."

She held out her hand to the wounded man, as one man would have done to another.

He would undoubtedly have accepted the proffered

civility, had not Mary at the moment raised her finger, as if to call their attention.

"Hush!" said Bertha, listening, as her sister was doing, with her hand half extended toward his.

They heard a quick, noisy, incessant yelping at some distance, but rapidly approaching, — the yelping of dogs who are hot upon the quarry.

It was the Marquis de Souday's pack once more, which, not having the same reasons that his daughters had for remaining in the path, had darted in pursuit of the wounded hare, and were driving him back again.

Bertha pounced upon the young man's rifle, the right barrel of which had been discharged. He made a movement as if to prevent what might be a rash proceeding, but her smile reassured him.

She quickly thrust the ramrod into the loaded barrel, as every prudent hunter does when he is about to use a gun which somebody else has loaded, and, having made sure that it was in proper order, she took a few steps forward, handling the gun with an easy grace which showed how familiar she was with its use.

Almost at the same moment the hare leaped out of the hedge on the opposite side, apparently with the purpose of taking again to the road; but as he caught sight of our three friends, he turned quickly to retrace his steps. But, notwithstanding the rapidity of his movements, Bertha had had time to take aim at him; she fired, and the animal rolled down the slope as if struck by lightning, and lay dead in the middle of the road. Meanwhile Mary had taken her sister's place, and extended her hand to the young man. For some seconds they stood with their hands clasped, watching what was going on.

Bertha ran to pick up the hare, and came back to the stranger, who was still holding Mary's hand.

"See, monsieur, here is your excuse," she said.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You can say that the hare started up under your feet; that your gun went off without your knowing it, of its own accord, and you can make the *amende honorable* to Madame your mother, by swearing a solemn oath, as you did to us just now, that you'll never do so any more. The hare will plead extenuating circumstances for you."

The young man shook his head despondently.

"No," he said, "I should never dare to confess to my mother that I disobeyed her."

"Pray, did she positively forbid your hunting?"

"I should say she did!"

"And here you are poaching!" said Bertha; "you have begun just where people generally leave off. Come, admit, at least, that you have a vocation for it."

"Don't joke, mademoiselle; you have been so kind to me that I could not be sulky to you again, and the result would be that you would cause me a double allowance of discomfort."

"You have only two courses open to you, then, monsieur," said Mary: "one is to lie,—and that you don't want to do, nor should we think of advising you to do it; the other is to confess the truth frankly. Believe me, whatever may be your mother's opinion as to the diversion in which you have indulged without her knowledge, your frankness will disarm her. After all, the death of a hare is not such a terrible crime."

"It makes no difference. I should never dare!"

"Oh, is Madame your mother such a very terrible personage?" asked Bertha.

"No, mademoiselle; she is very kind and devoted to me. She anticipates all my wishes, and gratifies all my

whims; but on the point of letting me touch a gun, she is absolutely intractable. And it's easily understood," said the youth, with a sigh; "my father was killed while hunting."

The young girls started.

"In that case, monsieur," said Bertha, with as sober a mien as his whom she addressed, "our pleasantry has been extremely ill-timed, and our regret is correspondingly deep. I hope, therefore, that you will forget the pleasantry, and remember only the regret."

"I shall remember nothing, mademoiselle, but the kind attentions you have showered upon me; and it is for me to hope that you will be good enough to forget my childish fright and my idiotic sensitiveness."

"Indeed we shall remember them, monsieur," said Mary, "so that we may never more put ourselves in the wrong with another as we have with you, with such unpleasant consequences."

While Mary was replying, Bertha had remounted her horse.

The young man timidly offered his hand again to Mary, who touched it with the ends of her fingers and leaped lightly into the saddle.

Then calling the dogs, which quickly obeyed their voices and came jumping around them, they put spurs to their horses and rode rapidly away.

The wounded man, speechless and motionless, stood for some time gazing after them, until a turn in the road hid them from his sight. Then he let his head fall forward upon his chest, and remained on the same spot in deep thought.

Let us stay for a while by this new acquaintance, whom it is quite necessary for us to know more intimately.

CHAPTER VII.

MONSIEUR MICHEL.

RECENT events had produced so extraordinary an impression upon the young man that, when the two girls disappeared, it seemed to him as if he were coming out of a dream.

He was, in fact, at that time of life when even those who are destined to become the most matter-of-fact men pay their tribute to the romantic side of existence; and this encounter with two young women, so entirely different from those whom he was accustomed to meet, transported him into the chimerical world of dreams, where his imagination could lose itself at its leisure, and look for the castles built by fairy hands, which crumble by the roadside as we advance in years and wisdom.

We do not mean to say, however, that our young acquaintance had gone so far as to fall in love with either of the Amazons; but he felt the spur of most intense curiosity, so entirely out of the common course did that combination of distinguished bearing, personal beauty, refined manners, and manly habits seem to him.

So he promised himself that he would make an effort to see them again, or at least to find out who they were.

Providence seemed inclined for an instant to satisfy his curiosity upon the spot; for just as he was starting for home, and was about five hundred feet from the place where the little scene between himself and the two

young women had been enacted, he met an individual with his legs incased in long leathern gaiters, carrying a hunting-horn and a carbine slung over his shoulder, and a dog-whip in his hand.

He was walking rapidly, and seemed in very bad humor.

It was evidently a whipper-in of the hunt which the girls had been following; so the young man, with his most gracious expression and his most engaging smile, accosted him.

"My friend," said he, "are you not looking for two young ladies, one riding a brown bay horse and the other a roan mare?"

"In the first place, I am not your friend, monsieur, for I don't know you; in the second place, I am not looking for two young ladies, but for my dogs," was the brutal reply of the man in the blouse, — "my dogs, which were just now turned off the trail of a wolf they were chasing by an idiot who started them after a hare which he had missed, like the donkey that he is."

The young man bit his lips, while the man in the blouse, in whom our readers have doubtless recognized Jean Oullier, continued:—

"Yes, I saw it all from the slope of La Benaste, which I was just coming down in pursuit of our beast; and I would gladly have abandoned my claim to the bounty which M. le Marquis de Souday has turned over to me, to have been within two or three whip-lengths of that unmannerly cub's backbone!"

The youth to whom he was speaking did not think it advisable, at the end of this scene, to lay claim to the *rôle* which he had intended to assume; and in reply to Jean Oullier's diatribe, to which he listened as if it were all news to him, he said only a word.

"Ah, you belong to M. le Marquis de Souday?"

Jean looked askance at his unfortunate interlocutor.

"I belong to myself," he replied. "I look after M. le Marquis de Souday's dogs, but that's all; and I do it quite as much for my own pleasure as for his."

"It is six months since I returned to mamma's house," the young man said, as if to himself, "and in all that time I have never heard that M. le Marquis de Souday was married—"

"Well," the old Vendean interrupted, "you can learn it from me, my dear sir; and if you have any comment to make, I will teach you something else. Do you understand?"

Having delivered himself of these words in a threatening tone, which his auditor did not seem to understand, Jean Oullier, without further thought for the frame of mind in which he left him, turned on his heel and broke off the interview, walking rapidly away towards Machecoul.

Left alone once more, the youth took a few steps in the direction he had followed since the young ladies left him, and then, turning to the left, entered a field.

In this field a peasant was driving a plough.

He was a man of some forty years, who was distinguished from his fellow Poiteirns by the crafty cast of countenance which is peculiarly characteristic of the Norman; he was high-colored, and his eye was bright and piercing. His constant endeavor seemed to be to diminish, or perhaps it would be better to say to cloak, the boldness of the last-named feature by incessant winking. He hoped, without doubt, by this means to achieve an expression of foolishness, or at least of good-nature, which would paralyze the distrust of an interlocutor; but his sneering mouth, sharply drawn up at

the corners, somewhat after the style of the god Pan, revealed in him, in spite of his pains, one of the most remarkable products of a cross between the breeds of Marne and Normandy.

Although the youth was evidently coming to speak to him, the laborer did not suspend his work: he knew the strain which it would entail upon his horses to begin again, if they were stopped in the middle of a furrow in that hard, clayey soil. So he kept on as if he had been alone; and it was not until he reached the end of the furrow, and had turned his team about, and adjusted his plough to begin anew, that he seemed disposed to enter into conversation, while his horses were taking breath.

"Well," he said, almost familiarly, to the new-comer, "have we had good sport, Monsieur Michel?"

The young man, without replying, unslung the game-bag from his shoulder, and let it fall at the peasant's feet. Through the wide mesh of the netting he saw the silky, yellowish coat of the hare.

"Oho!" said he, "a capucin! You don't come home empty-handed from your first hunt, Monsieur Michel."

With that he took the animal out of the bag, examined him like a connoisseur, pressed his abdomen gently, as if, in the matter of preserving game, he had not entire confidence in the precautions which so inexperienced a hunter as M. Michel seemed to be would be likely to take.

"Ah, *sapredienne!*" he cried, when his examination was concluded, "that's worth three francs, ten sous, if it's worth a centime. That was a fine shot of yours, do you know, Monsieur Michel! and you must find it more diverting to knock over buck hares than to read

old books, as you were doing when I met you just now." ¹

"Faith, no, Père Courtin," replied the young man. "I like my books much better than your gun."

"You may be right, Monsieur Michel," rejoined Courtin, over whose face passed a shade of dissatisfaction; "and, if your deceased father had thought as you do, it would have been all the better for him, perhaps. But, all the same, if I had the chance, and if I was not a poor devil obliged to work twelve hours out of the twenty-four, I would do something better than pass my nights in hunting."

"Do you still go on the watch, Courtin?" asked the young man.

"Yes, Monsieur Michel, now and then, to amuse myself."

"You will get into trouble with the gendarmes!"

"Bah! they are sluggards, those gendarmes, and they don't get up early enough to catch me."

He added, with the cunning expression which he commonly tried to restrain, —

"I know much more than they, Monsieur Michel, you know. There are not two Courtins in the province, and the only way of preventing me from going on the watch would be to make me a keeper like Jean Oullier."

But M. Michel made no reply to this indirect suggestion; and as he had no idea who Jean Oullier might be, he paid no more heed to the second part of the sentence than to the first.

"Here's your gun, Courtin," said he, handing the weapon to the peasant. "I thank you for having thought of suggesting to me to use it; your intentions were good,

¹ There is a play upon words in the text here: the same word (*bouquins*) means "buck hares" and "old books."

and it is not your fault if I can't find the sport in hunting that everybody else does."

"You must try again, Monsieur Michel; you must learn to like it. The best dogs are those which show their temper latest in life. I have heard amateurs who eat thirty dozen oysters for lunch say that they could never even look at one until they were past twenty. Leave the château with a book, as you did this morning; Madame la Baronne will suspect nothing. Come and hunt up Père Courtin; his outfit will always be at your service. And if my work is not too urgent, I will draw the covers for you. Meanwhile, I will put the gun in the rack."

Père Courtin's gun-rack was nothing more than the hedge which separated his field from his neighbor's.

He slipped the gun into the hedge, and arranged the thorns and briers so as to hide it from the gaze of passers-by and at the same time protect it from the rain and dampness, — two things about which your true poacher bothers his head but little, so long as he has candle-ends and some lint.

"Courtin," said M. Michel, with an affectation of the utmost indifference, "did you know that M. le Marquis de Souday was married?"

"Faith, no," said the peasant. "I did not know it."

M. Michel was deceived by his appearance of good faith.

"And that he had two daughters?" he continued.

Courtin, who was just completing the task of hiding his gun, by twisting together some obstinate branches, quickly raised his head, and looked at the young man so earnestly and inquisitively at the same time, that he blushed to the whites of his eyes, although his question had no other motive than curiosity, pure and simple.

"Have you fallen in with the She-wolves?" Courtin inquired. "Indeed, I thought I heard the old Chouan's horn."

"What do you mean by the she-wolves?" asked M. Michel.

"Why, I call the marquis's bastards the She-wolves!"

"Those two young girls,— you call them wolves?"

"*Dame!* that's the name they gave them hereabout; but you are just from Paris, you see, and know nothing of it."

The vulgar fashion in which Master Courtin expressed himself concerning the young women was so embarrassing to the bashful youth that he replied with a falsehood without knowing why.

"No," said he, "I did n't meet them."

Courtin's suspicions were aroused by the manner in which he said it.

"So much the worse for you," said he, "for they are two pretty slips of girls, good to look at, and pleasant to have some sport with."

Then, looking at M. Michel, and winking as usual, he continued,—

"They say that they are a little too fond of laughing; but all good little children must do that, must they not, Monsieur Michel?"

Without understanding the real cause of his emotion, the young man felt his blood grow hotter and hotter as he heard the vulgar peasant speak with his insulting air of indulgence of the two charming Amazons whom he had left with a very vivid sensation of admiration and gratitude.

His ill-humor was reflected on his countenance.

Courtin had no longer any doubt that M. Michel had met the "She-wolves," as he called them; and his denial

that such was the fact led the peasant to suspect possible results of the meeting which were entirely unwarranted by the facts.

It was certain that the Marquis de Souday had been in the neighborhood of La Logerie within a short time; it seemed more than probable that M. Michel had seen Bertha and Mary, who were rarely far away from their father, when hunting was going on; it might even be that the young man had done more than see them,—he might have talked with them; and thanks to the general opinion of the sisters in the neighborhood, a conversation with Mesdemoiselles de Souday could not fail to be the beginning of an intrigue.

From one deduction to another, Courtin, who was a logical man, arrived at the conclusion that his young master had reached that point.

We say his young master because Courtin cultivated a farm which belonged to M. Michel.

But the laborer's daily task was not congenial to Courtin: he aimed at becoming the private keeper of mother and son; and the crafty fellow tried in every possible way to establish a community of interest between his young master and himself.

He had failed in his attempt to encourage him in disobeying the maternal injunctions regarding the hunt; to become the confidant of his love affairs seemed to him a very convenient way of serving his own interests and his paltry ambition. By the cloud of annoyance which spread over M. Michel's face, he saw that he had gone astray in making himself the mouthpiece of the general disapprobation of the two Amazons, and he set about regaining the ground he had lost.

We have already seen him begin to hedge a little upon the first sneering characterization of them.

He went on in the same road.

"However," said he, with well-assumed good-nature, "people always say a good deal more — especially about young women — than there's any justification for. Mademoiselle Bertha and Mademoiselle Mary —"

"Are their names Bertha and Mary?" the young man asked eagerly.

"Bertha and Mary, yes. Mademoiselle Bertha is dark, and Mademoiselle Mary light."

As he gazed at M. Michel with all the acuteness he could put into his gaze, it seemed to him as if the young man reddened slightly at the name of Mary.

"I was saying," the persistent fellow went on, "that Mademoiselle Mary and Mademoiselle Bertha are fond of hunting, dogs, and horses; but that does not prevent their being good girls. Monsieur the late curé of La Benaste, who was a very clever poacher, didn't say the worst masses in the world because his dog was in the sacristy, and his gun hung on the altar."

"It's a fact," said M. Michel, forgetting that his words gave the lie to his earlier assertion, "that they have a very gentle and kind way about them, especially Mademoiselle Mary."

"And they are gentle and kind, Monsieur Michel, they are indeed! Last year, during the hot, damp weather, when that sort of malarial fever which carried off so many poor devils was prevalent all about, who looked after the sick without shrinking, when doctors and druggists and the whole trembling crew, even to the veterinaries, had left the place? The She-wolves, as every one calls them. Oh, they don't go about preaching charity, but they visit the houses of the unfortunate secretly; they sow alms and reap blessings. So, even if the rich do hate them, and the nobles are jealous of

them, ah! one can say without fear of contradiction that they have the poor on their side."

"Pray, what is the reason that they are thought so hardly of?" asked M. Michel.

"Pshaw! how can one say? Do people ask such questions or go into details? With men, you see, Monsieur Michel, it's just as it is with birds; when one of them is sick, the others all come to pull out his feathers. It's sure enough though, that those of their own station turn their backs, and throw stones at these poor girls. For instance, Monsieur Michel, your mother's a good soul, isn't she? Well, just speak to her of them, and I am sure she would say with everybody else, 'They're bad women!'"

However, notwithstanding Courtin's change of front, M. Michel seemed disinclined to talk familiarly with him; while the peasant himself concluded that, for one sitting, he had sufficiently paved the way for the confidence which he hoped to extort.

As M. Michel seemed disposed to leave him, he escorted him to the end of his field; and as they walked along he noticed that the young man's looks were very often bent upon the dark masses of the forest of Machecoul.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARONNE OF LA LOGERIE.

MASTER Courtin respectfully lowered for his young master the movable bars which gave entrance to his field, just as a female voice calling Michel was heard on the other side of the hedge.

At the sound of this voice the young man started and stopped.

At the same moment the person who had called his name appeared at the end of the fence which separated Courtin's from the adjoining field.

This person, this lady, might have been anywhere from forty to forty-five. Let us try to describe her to our readers.

Her face was insignificant, and without other distinguishing characteristic than an expression of borrowed haughtiness, which was in sharp contrast with her very ordinary appearance. She was short and stout; she wore a silk dress absurdly out of place in the fields, and a hat with brown streamers falling down over her face and neck. One would have thought, so elaborate was the balance of her toilet, that she had been making calls in the Chaussée d'Antin, or the Faubourg Saint Honoré.

She was the one whose future reproaches had apparently aroused such dire apprehension in the mind of the poor youth.

"What!" she cried, "you here, Michel! Really, my dear, you are very unreasonable and have very little regard for your mother! It's more than an hour since

the bell of the château rang to call you to dinner; you know how I detest waiting, and how particular I am to have meals at stated hours, and yet I find you here coolly talking with this countryman!"

Michel began to stammer an excuse, but at that instant the maternal eye perceived something which had escaped Courtin, or which Courtin had not thought best to ask questions about. She noticed that her son's head was bound up with a handkerchief, and that the said handkerchief was covered with spots of blood, which his straw hat imperfectly concealed for all its wide brim.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" she cried, elevating her voice, whose ordinary tones were pitched too high, "you are wounded! What has happened to you? Tell me, my poor boy! You see that I am dying with anxiety!"

Thereupon she climbed the fence with an impatient celerity which one would not have dared to expect from a person of her years and corpulence; and having reached her son's side, she removed his hat and the handkerchief before he could prevent her.

The wound, reopened by the hasty removal of the bandage, began to bleed afresh.

M. Michel was so unprepared to see the crisis he had dreaded hastened in this way, that he stood like one bewildered, and knew not what to say.

Master Courtin came to his rescue.

The sly peasant saw from the young man's embarrassment that, while he dared not confess his disobedience, he hesitated to exculpate himself by a lie; he, Courtin, had not the same scruples, and he resolutely loaded his conscience with the sin which Michel, in his innocence, did not dare to commit.

"Oh, Madame la Baronne need not be at all anxious! It's nothing," he said; "absolutely nothing."

"Well, but what has happened to him? Answer for him, Courtin, since Monsieur insists upon holding his peace."

The young man's mouth did, in fact, seem to be hermetically closed.

"You shall know, Madame la Baronne," replied Courtin. "I must tell you that I had a bundle of my fall prunings here; it was so heavy that I couldn't get it upon my shoulders by myself; M. Michel was kind enough to help me, and a miserable branch made a scratch on his forehead, as you see."

"Why, it's much more than a scratch! You might have put his eye out! Another time, Master Courtin, get your equals to put your fagots on your shoulders for you, do you hear? Aside from the fact that you might have blinded the child, what you did was very unseemly!"

Master Courtin bent his head with due humility, as if he realized the full extent of his wrong-doing; but that did not prevent him, as he noticed the game-bag still lying on the turf, from sending it to join the gun in the hedge, with a cleverly calculated kick.

"Come now, *Monsieur Michel*," said the Baronne, whose ill-humor did not seem to have been allayed by the peasant's submissive demeanor; "come, and we will have the doctor look at your wound."

She turned back after taking a few steps.

"Apropos, Master Courtin," said she, "you have n't yet paid your quarter's rent, due on St. John's Day, and yet your lease expires at Easter. Look to it; for I am fully determined not to retain any tenants who are unpunctual in meeting their engagements."

Master Courtin's face assumed a still more piteous expression than it had a few seconds before; the wrinkles disappeared, however, when the young man, while his

mother was clambering over the palisades with much less ease than before, said to him in an undertone:

“To-morrow!”

Thus it was, that notwithstanding the threat he had listened to, he seized his plough-handles once more very blithely, and went to work at another furrow, while his masters were on their way to the château; and all the rest of the afternoon he kept up the spirits of his horses by singing “*La Parisienne*,” — a patriotic tune much in vogue at that time.

Let us leave Master Courtin humming the aforesaid ditty, to the great satisfaction of his team, and say a few words about the Michel family.

You have seen the son, dear reader; and you have seen the mother.

The mother was the widow of one of those contractors for supplies who had succeeded in making a very considerable fortune at the expense of the State, and in a very short time, by following on the skirts of the imperial armies, and who were dubbed by the soldiers with the speaking sobriquet of “*riz-pain-sel*” (rice-bread-salt).

This contractor’s family name was Michel; he was a native of the department of La Mayenne, the son of a common peasant, and nephew of a village schoolmaster, who decided the boy’s future by adding a few hints about arithmetic to the lessons in reading and writing which he gave him gratis.

Being included in the first conscription of 1791, Michel the peasant reached the quarters of the Twenty-second demi-brigade with very luke-warm enthusiasm. This fellow, who was destined at a later day to become so distinguished a personage, had already figured up his chances of being killed or of becoming a general. As the result of his calculations was only moderately satis-

factory to him, he very cleverly brought his beautiful handwriting into play, and got an appointment in the quarter-master's department; he received that favor with such earnest satisfaction as another than he would have shown on obtaining promotion on the field.

It was in the commissary's tent, then, that Michel *père* made the campaigns of 1792 and 1793.

Toward the middle of the latter year, General Rossignol, who was sent to pacify or exterminate La Vendée, having by chance come in contact with Michel the clerk, in the quarter-master's office, and having learned from him that he came from the insurgent district and that all his friends were in the Vendean ranks, thought he might turn this providential circumstance to good account. He procured for Michel indefinite leave of absence, and sent him home upon no other condition than that he should take service among the Chouans, and from time to time do for him what M. de Maurepas used to do for his Majesty Louis XV., — that is to say, furnish him with the news of the day. Now, Michel, who had found the employment greatly to his advantage in a pecuniary aspect, held to it with scrupulous fidelity, with General Rossignol's successors, as well as with that officer himself. He was deeply engaged in his *gossipy* correspondence with the Republican leaders when it came General Travot's turn to be sent to La Vendée.

We know the result of General Travot's operations, as they formed the theme of one of the earlier chapters of this book; here, however, is a brief *resumé*: The Vendean army demolished, Jolly slain, De Couëtu taken in ambush through the treachery of some person unknown, and last of all Charette made prisoner in the wood of La Chabotière, and shot on the Place de Viarmes at Nantes.

What part did Michel play in the successive catastrophes of that terrible drama? That we shall perhaps learn hereafter; it is a fact that, some time subsequent to this bloody episode, Michel, still recommended by his fine handwriting, entered the employ of a famous contractor for supplies in the capacity of clerk.

He made rapid progress; for in 1805 we find him supplying part of the munitions to the army of Germany on his own account.

In 1806 his shoes and gaiters took an active part in the heroic Prussian campaign.

In 1809 he obtained the whole contract for provisioning the army which entered Spain.

In 1810 he married the only daughter of one of his *confrères*, and thus doubled his fortune.

Further than that, he lengthened out his name, that being one of the greatest ambitions of all those whose names were rather brief.

It was in this way that the addition he so coveted was brought about: —

M. Michel's wife's father's name was Baptiste Durand; he was of the little village of La Logerie, and to distinguish himself from another Durand, whom he had several times met in his business, he went by the name of Durand de la Logerie. At least that was his excuse.

He had had his daughter educated at one of the best boarding schools in Paris, where her name was entered on the books as Stéphanie Durand de la Logerie.

Once married to his *confrère's* daughter, Monsieur the Commissary Michel considered that his wife's name would look very well at the end of his own, and he became Michel de la Logerie.

Last of all, at the Restoration, a title of the Holy Empire, bought for hard cash, permitted him to call

himself Baron Michel de la Logerie, and thus to define his position in the financial and territorial aristocracy of the moment.

Some years after the return of the Bourbons, — that is to say, about 1819 or 1820, — Baron Michel de la Logerie had the misfortune to lose his father-in-law, Messire Baptiste Durand de la Logerie.

He left to his daughter and consequently to his son-in-law, his estate of La Logerie, situated, as our readers may have guessed from hints given in earlier chapters, some five or six leagues from the forest of Machecoul.

Baron Michel de la Logerie determined, like the worthy nobleman he was, to take possession of his estate and show himself to his vassals. Baron Michel was a clever fellow, he had his eye on a seat in the Chamber, which he could reach only by election; and his election depended on his popularity in the department of Loire-Inférieure.

He was peasant-born; he had lived with peasants until he was twenty-five, save for the two or three years he had passed in the bureaux, so he knew how to approach the peasants. Moreover he had to obtain their pardon for his good-fortune.

He played the part of the good prince, hunted up some of his comrades in the old Vendean wars, grasped them by the hand and spoke with tears in his eyes of the death of poor M. Jolly, dear M. de Couëtu, and good M. Charette; he investigated the needs of the commune, with which he had little acquaintance; he built a bridge which established most valuable communications between the departments of Loire-Inférieure and La Vendée, repaired three roads in the neighborhood, and rebuilt a church, endowed an orphans' hospital, and one for old men, reaped a harvest of benedictions, and took

so much satisfaction in the paternal *rôle* that he announced his purpose of passing only six months of the year in the capital thenceforth, and the other six at the Château de la Logerie.

At last yielding to the entreaties of his wife, who had remained at Paris and did not comprehend this vehement passion for green fields which had taken possession of him, and who wrote thence letters upon letters to hasten his return, Baron Michel decided to comply with her wishes on a certain Monday then next ensuing, after devoting the Sunday to a grand slaughter of wolves which was to take place in the wood of La Pauvrière and the forest of Grand'Land, then overrun with these beasts.

It was another philanthropic work which Baron Michel de la Logerie had undertaken.

On this occasion Baron Michel continued to play the part of the good rich man; he supplied refreshments, and provided two hogsheads of wine, which were drawn on wagons in the rear of those who were beating the woods for those to drink who chose. He ordered a magnificent feast to be ready when the sport was at an end, and invited two or three entire villages to partake; he refused the post of honor in the battue which was offered him, but insisted upon taking his chance with the rest in drawing lots, and chance having relegated him to the extreme end of the line, he took his ill-fortune with an imperturbable good-humor which enchanted everybody.

The battue was a splendid success; animals emerged from every thicket, and such a constant firing was kept up all along the line that you would have said a little war was in progress. Wolves and boars began to accumulate in the wagon beside the baron's hogsheads, without reckoning the contraband game, such as hares

and kids, which were slain in this battue as in all others under the general head of *harmful* animals, and which were discreetly put out of sight by the participants with the intention of coming back to get them under cover of night.

The intoxication of success was such that the hero of the day was forgotten for the moment; and it was not until the last comer had been beaten out that they began to think that nobody had seen Baron Michel since morning. Inquiries were made, but nothing had been seen of him since he had drawn the number which sent him off to such a distance when the battue began. They supposed that he had grown weary of the amusement or was too solicitous for the entertainment of his guests, and had returned to the little town of Légé, where the banquet had been prepared by his orders; but when they reached Légé the huntsmen did not find him there. Some, less thoughtful than the others, fell to without him; but five or six, with gloomy forebodings, returned to the wood of La Pauvrière, and began to search for him by the light of torches and lanterns.

After two hours of fruitless searching, they found him in the ditch surrounding the second enclosure that was beaten.

He was stone dead: a ball had pierced his heart.

His death made a great sensation; the public prosecutor of Nantes took the matter up, and the hunter whose station was next below the baron's was arrested. He declared that, being one hundred and fifty paces from the baron, and separated from him by a corner of the wood, he had neither seen nor heard anything. It was proved, too, that the gun of the accused peasant had not been discharged at all that day; and in addition to all that, it appeared that he could not have hit the

victim except in the right side from the place where he was stationed, and Baron Michel's wound was in his left side.

The inquiry went no farther; it was necessary to charge the death of the ex-commissary to chance; and the supposition was that a stray ball, as often happens in beating woods, had struck him, without any evil design on the part of the man from whose gun it proceeded.

And yet there was a sort of vague rumor throughout the country-side of vengeance accomplished; they said,—but they said it very low, as if every tuft of grass might still conceal the gun of a Chouan,—they said that some one of the old troops of Jolly, Couëtu, and Charette had made the unfortunate contractor expiate his treason, and the death of those three illustrious leaders; but there were too many people interested in the secret to admit of a direct accusation being made.

Baronne Michel de la Logerie was thus left a widow with an only son.

Baronne Michel was one of those women with all the negative virtues, who are so common in the world. Of vices she did not possess the shadow of a single one; of passion she had hardly known the name up to that time. Harnessed at seventeen to the marriage-car, she had gone straight ahead in the matrimonial furrow, without once swerving to right or left, and without even so much as wondering if there were no other road. The idea that a woman might kick against the pricks had never entered her head. Freed from the yoke, she was afraid of her freedom, and instinctively sought new chains; these she found in religion, and like all narrow-minded people, she began to run to seed, in a false and exaggerated, yet thoroughly conscientious, devotion to piety.

Madame la Baronne Michel believed herself to be a saint pure and simple; she was regular in her attendance at all services, kept all the fasts, and obeyed all the injunctions of the Church; and he who told her that she sinned seven times every day would have astonished her beyond expression. And yet nothing was more true, for without assailing her on any point except humility, it was possible, at any moment in the day, to surprise her in the very act of disobedience to the precepts of the Saviour of mankind; for, although she had little claim to superiority, she carried her aristocratic arrogance to the point of madness.

Thus we saw that our crafty Master Courtin, who called the son *Monsieur Michel*, without ceremony, never once failed to bestow the "Baronne" upon the mother.

Naturally, Madame de la Logerie held the world and the age in abhorrence; she never read a police report in her newspaper that she did not accuse them both — the world and the age — of the blackest immorality. To hear her talk, one would have said that the Iron Age dated from 1800; and so her most anxious care had been to keep her son from the contagion of the ideas of the day, by rearing him far from the world and its dangers. She would never listen to a suggestion of public education for him; even the Jesuit establishments were looked upon with suspicion by her, because of the facility with which the good fathers allowed the young people intrusted to their care to fulfil their social obligations; and if the heir of the Michels did receive a few lessons from strangers to whom his mother was forced to have recourse for instruction in the arts and sciences indispensable to a young man's education, they were always given in her presence, and upon a plan approved by her.

Indeed, she assumed the entire duty of deciding what direction should be given to his studies, especially in the moral part of his education.

The more than ordinary supply of intelligence with which heaven had endowed that young brain, was quite necessary to enable it to emerge safe and sound from the torture which it was compelled to undergo for ten years.

But it did emerge, as we have seen it, weak and vacillating, and entirely lacking in that force and resolution which denote a man, — the embodiment, that is to say, of energy, decision, and intelligence.

CHAPTER IX.

GALON D'OR AND ALLÉGRO.

As Michel had expected and feared, he was sternly taken to task by his mother.

She was not deceived by Master Courtin's romance; she knew that the wound on her son's head was not a mere scratch made by a thorn. And so, not knowing what interest he could have in concealing the cause of the wound from her, and convinced that she should not get at the truth, even by questioning him further, she contented herself with staring fixedly at the mysterious wound from time to time, shaking her head, heaving deep sighs, and corrugating her maternal brow.

The young man was very ill at ease during dinner, keeping his eyes on his plate, and eating but little; if the truth must be told, however, his mother's scrutiny was not the only thing which troubled him.

Between his lowered eyes and the maternal gaze two shadows were constantly flitting back and forth.

These two shadows were evoked by his haunting memories of Bertha and Mary.

Michel thought of Bertha, to tell the truth, with some vexation. What sort of a creature could she be, who handled a gun like a professional hunter, and bound up wounds like a surgeon, and who, when her patient tried to resist, twisted his wrists with her shapely white hands, as Jean Oullier might have done with his brown, callous ones.

Oh, but how lovely Mary was, with her waving blond locks and her great blue eyes! how soft her voice was, and how persuasive her accent! how gently she had touched the wound, washed away the blood, and tied the bandage!

Verily, Michel did not regret his wound, when he remembered that without it there would have been no occasion for the two girls to speak a word to him, or to bother their heads about him.

To be sure there was one thing that was much more serious than his wound, — namely, the ill-humor it had caused his mother, and the suspicions which might be awakened in her mind; but Madame de la Logerie's wrath would soon blow over, while the impression left on his heart by those few seconds when Mary's hand lay in his, would long endure.

Like every heart which is beginning to love, but does not yet recognize the sensation, he felt the need of nothing so much as to be alone.

The result was that after dinner he took advantage of a moment when his mother was talking with a servant, and left the house without hearing what she was saying, or rather without paying any attention to her words.

These were, however, of some importance.

Madame de la Logerie forbade her son to go in the direction of Saint Christophe du Ligneron, where, according to her servant's story, there was an outbreak of a malignant fever.

Then she decreed that a sanitary cordon should be established around La Logerie, so that no resident of the infected village should be allowed to enter the château.

The order was carried out on the instant, and made to apply to a young girl who came to ask the baronne's

help for her father, who was in the first stages of a fever.

Doubtless if Michel had not been so absorbed in his own thoughts, he would have paid some heed to his mother's words; for the sick man was his foster-father, the farmer Tinguy, and the messenger who came in quest of assistance his foster-sister Rosine, for whom he had great affection.

But at that moment the young man's eyes were turned in the direction of Souday, and his thoughts were busy with a charming She-wolf, who answered to the name of Mary. Thus he was soon lost to sight in the thickest and deepest portion of the park.

He had taken a book with him to keep himself in countenance; but, although he made a pretence of reading until he came to the first great trees, the person who should have asked him the name of his book would have put him to the blush.

He sat down upon a bench and began to muse.

Upon what subject did the youth muse?

The question is very easily answered.

How could he see Mary and her sister again?

Chance had brought him face to face with them once, but not till six months after his return to the province; so chance had not been in a hurry. And if chance should take a notion to let six more months go by without arranging for him a second meeting with the sisters, his heart, in its present condition, would grow weary of waiting.

On the other hand, it was no simple matter to open communications with the Château de Souday.

There was no great sympathy between the marquis, an *émigré* of 1790, and Baron Michel de la Logerie, a noble of the Empire.

Jean Oullier, too, in the few words he had exchanged with the young man, had manifested no absorbing desire to cultivate his acquaintance.

There remained the two young ladies who had shown an interest in him, after their respective manners, — Bertha, brusque, and Mary, gentle. But how was he to get at them; for, although they hunted two or three times a week, it was always in company with their father and Jean Oullier.

Michel made up his mind to read, one after another, all the novels he could find in the library at the château, hoping to discover in some one of them some clever expedient, which he began to fear that his brain, thrown back upon its own inspirations, would never supply.

Just then he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and turned his head with a start.

It was Master Courtin.

The worthy farmer's face expressed a degree of satisfaction which he took no pains to conceal.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Michel; excuse me," said the farmer. "But as I saw you sitting there as motionless as a stump, I thought it must be your statue, and not yourself."

"Well, you see now that it's I, Courtin."

"I am very glad of it, Monsieur Michel. I was anxious to know how you got along with Madame la Baronne."

"She scolded a little."

"Oh, I thought she would! Did you say anything about the hare?"

"Indeed, I was very careful not to."

"And about the Wolves?"

"What wolves?" asked the young man, not sorry to lead the conversation to that point.

"The She-wolves of Machecoul. I was thinking that I told you that was the name given to the Souday young women."

"I was less likely to speak of them than of the hare, Courtin, you know! I fancy that the dogs of Souday and those of La Logerie don't hunt in couples, as they say."

"In any event," rejoined Courtin, with the cunning expression which he could not always succeed in restraining, despite his efforts, "if your dogs don't hunt together, you may, if you choose, hunt with their dogs."

"What do you mean?"

"Look!" said Courtin, pulling up, and, in a sense, introducing upon the stage two hounds coupled together, and which he held in leash.

"What have you got there?" the young baron asked.

"What have I got here? Why, Galon d'Or and Allégro, to be sure!"

"But I don't know what Galon d'Or and Allégro are."

"They are that bandit Jean Oullier's dogs."

"How do you come to have taken them if they are his?"

"I have n't taken them; I have simply put them in the pound."

"By what right?"

"By two rights, — in the first place as a landowner, and in the second as mayor."

Courtin was mayor of the village of La Logerie, which comprised a score of houses, and very proud he was of the title.

"Will you kindly explain these rights to me, Courtin?"

"Well, in the first place, Monsieur Michel, as mayor

I confiscate them, because I catch them hunting in the close season."

"I did n't know there was any close season for wolves; and as M. de Souday is master of the wolf-hunt —"

"Very good; if he is master of the hunt, let him hunt his wolves in Machecoul forest, and not in the open. Furthermore," added Master Courtin with his sly smile, "you saw yourself that it was n't a wolf they were chasing, for it was a hare; and indeed it was one of the She-wolves who killed the hare."

The young man was on the point of telling Courtin that this name of "She-wolves," applied to Mesdemoiselles de Souday, was offensive to him, and of requesting him not to make use of it again; but he hardly dared to put his request quite so explicitly.

"It was Mademoiselle Bertha who killed it, Courtin," he said. "But I fired first, and wounded it; so I am the culprit."

"Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense! What do you mean by that? Would you have fired if the dogs had n't been chasing him? No. So it was the fault of the dogs that you fired, and that Mademoiselle Bertha killed him; and so I, as mayor, punish the dogs for having, under the pretext of hunting a wolf, hunted hares in the close season. But that is not all. After punishing them once as mayor, I punish them again as landowner. Have I given M. le Marquis's dogs leave to hunt on my estate?"

"Your estate, Courtin?" said Michel, laughing. "Are n't you making a slight mistake? I'm inclined to think they were hunting on my estate, or rather my mother's."

"It's all the same, Monsieur le Baron, since I cultivate your estate. Now, you know, it is no longer

1789, when noblemen had a right to ride over the peasant's crops with their hounds, and break them all down without paying for it. No, no, no! to-day we are in 1832, Monsieur Michel; every one is master of his own, and game belongs to him who feeds it. Therefore the hare run to ground by M. de Souday's dogs is mine, since it fed upon the wheat which I sowed upon Madame Michel's estate; and it is for me to eat the hare which you wounded and the She-wolf killed."

Michel made a movement, which Courtin detected out of the corner of his eye; he did not dare, however, to give voice to his displeasure."

"There is one thing that astonishes me," said he, "and that is, how these dogs, who strain so at the leash, and seem so unwilling to follow, ever allowed you to get hold of them."

"Oh," said Courtin, "I had no trouble about that! When I returned after helping you and Madame la Baronne over the fence, I found these gentlemen at table."

"At table?"

"Yes, at table in the hedge where I hid the hare; they had found it, and were dining. It seems that they can't be very well fed at the Château de Souday, and that they go hunting on their own account. Look! see the state to which they had reduced *my* hare."

As he spoke, Courtin drew from the capacious pocket of his jerkin the hindquarters of the animal which formed the principal part of the *corpus delicté*.

The head and forequarters had completely disappeared.

"And when I think," added Courtin, "that they accomplished this stroke of work in the short time that I was escorting you to the fence. Ah, my villains, you will have to put an end to me to make me forget that!"

"Courtin, let me remind you of one thing," said the young Baron.

"Oh, pray don't hesitate, Monsieur Michel."

"It is, that as mayor, your respect for the law ought to be twice as great as an ordinary mortal's."

"Legality is the very apple of my eye! Liberty! Public Order! Have you not noticed those words written on the façade of the mayor's house, Monsieur Michel?"

"Very well, so much the more reason why I should tell you that what you are doing is not legal and is destructive of liberty and public order."

"What!" said Courtin; "do you say that the She-wolves' dogs do not interfere with public order by hunting upon my estate in the close season, and that I am not at liberty to put them in the pound?"

"They do not interfere with public order, Courtin. They infringe private rights; and you have the right to bring suit against them, but not to impound them."

"Oh, that's altogether too tedious! And if I must let the dogs hunt, and content myself with bringing lawsuits, then it's the dogs that are free, and not men."

"Courtin," said the youth, with that self-sufficient air with which the man who has turned over the leaves of a law-book is always more or less afflicted, "you make the mistake which many people make; you confuse liberty with independence. Independence, my friend, is the liberty of men who are not free."

"Pray what is liberty, then, Monsieur Michel?"

"Liberty, my dear Courtin, is the sacrifice which every man makes of his individual independence for the benefit of all. It is from the general stock of independence that an entire nation, as well as each citizen

thereof, derives liberty We are free, Courtin, not independent."

"Oh, I know nothing about that!" said Courtin. "I am mayor, and a landowner; I have in my possession Galon d'Or and Allégro, the best two dogs of the marquis's pack, and I propose to hang on to them. Let him come after them, and, by Jove! I'll ask him why he goes to meetings at Torfou and Montaign."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, I know what I mean!"

"Yes, but I don't."

"There is no reason why you should know; you are not mayor."

"Very true; but I am resident in the province, and I have an interest in knowing what is going on."

"Oh, as to that, it's not difficult to see what is going on! It is simply that these gentlemen are at their old game of conspiring."

"These gentlemen?"

"Yes, the nobles; those — I won't say what I was going to, although you are not a noble of that kind."

Michel blushed to the roots of his hair.

"You say that the nobles are conspiring, Courtin?"

"Pray what else would they be doing with their midnight assemblies? Let them come together in the daytime, the do-nothings, to eat and drink; that's allowable, and the authorities have nothing to say. But when they get together at night, then they will bear watching. At all events, let them beware! I have my eye on them. I am mayor, and if I have no right to put dogs in the pound, I have the right to put men in prison; I know what the Code says on that point."

"And you say that M. de Souday frequents these assemblies?"

"Upon my word, it would be curious if he did not, — an old Chouan, and a former aide-de-camp of Charette! Let him come and claim his dogs; yes, let him come, and I'll pack him off to Nantes, — him and his She-wolves! They can explain then why they ride around in the woods at night, as often happens."

"Why," said Michel, with an eagerness which there was no mistaking, "you told me with your own mouth, Courtin, that when they rode about at night, it was on errands of mercy to the sick poor."

Courtin fell back a step, and shook his finger at his young master, with his customary laugh.

"Ah, I've caught you!" said he.

"Caught me?" exclaimed the young man, blushing; "caught me at what?"

"They have made an impression on you."

"On me?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Oh, I don't blame you! — far from it. Although their reputations are a little shady, I will not be the one to say that they are not pretty. Come, don't blush like that; you are not just from boarding-school. You are neither priest nor deacon nor vicar; you are a handsome youth of twenty. Keep on, Monsieur Michel; they will be very hard to please if they don't find you to their liking, when you find them to yours."

"But, my dear Courtin," said Michel, "suppose for a moment that what you say is true, — which it is not, — do I know them? Do I know the marquis? Is the having met two young ladies riding a sufficient excuse for calling on them?"

"Oh, yes; I understand!" said Courtin, mockingly. "They have n't a sou, but they have very high and mighty manners. We must have a reason, a motive,

an excuse. Cudgel your brains, Monsieur Michel! You are very learned, you can speak Latin and Greek, you have studied the Code; you ought to be able to invent an excuse."

Michel shook his head.

"What!" said Courtin, "have you sought one, and failed to find it?"

"I did n't say so!" exclaimed the young man, quickly.

"Very good; but I say so. One is not so old at forty that one does not remember when one was twenty."

Michel said nothing, and kept his eyes on the ground; he could feel the peasant's gaze upon him.

"So you have n't thought of anything? Well, then, I have."

"You have?" cried the young man, eagerly, raising his head.

Then it seemed to occur to him that he was on the point of divulging his inmost thoughts, and he changed his tone.

"What the devil makes you think that I want to go to the château?" he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"And this," continued Courtin, as if his master had made no attempt to deny it, "is what I thought of."

Michel affected utter indifference, but he listened with all his ears.

"You say to Père Courtin, 'Père Courtin, you are mistaken as to your rights. Neither as mayor nor as landowner have you the right to put the Marquis de Souday's dogs in the pound; but you are entitled to an indemnity, which we will arrange between ourselves.' To which Père Courtin replies, 'Oh, I won't haggle with you, Monsieur Michel! We all know your generosity.' Whereupon you add, 'Courtin, just give me the dogs, and I'll look after the rest.' I say to you,

'Here are the dogs, Monsieur Michel. As to the indemnity, *dame!* one or two yellow boys will make it all right; I don't desire the death of the sinner.' Then, you understand, you write a little note to the marquis. You have found his dogs, you say, and send them back to him by Rousseau or Belette, for fear he may be uneasy about them; then he can't avoid thanking you, and asking you to call upon him. Unless, indeed, to make assurance perfectly sure, you take them back to him yourself."

"Very well, very well, Courtin," said the young baron; "leave the dogs with me. I will send them back to the marquis, not as a means of procuring an invitation to the château (for there isn't a word of truth in all your suppositions), but because one ought to be courteous to one's neighbors."

"Very well, then; consider that I said nothing. But they're two pretty slips of girls, all the same! As for the indemnity —"

"Here," said the young baron smiling, — "it's only fair, — here is pay for the injury the dogs did you in running over my estate, and eating half of the hare which Bertha killed."

He gave the farmer what he had in his purse, — some three or four louis.

It was very lucky that he had no more; for he was so enchanted to have at last an excuse for presenting himself at the Château de Souday that he would have given the farmer ten times that sum if he had had it in his pocket.

Courtin cast an appreciative glance upon the few louis he had received under the head of "indemnity," put the leash in the young man's hand, and turned away; but after a few steps, he returned to his master.

"After all, Monsieur Michel," said he, "don't get too intimate with those people. You know what I told you about the *gentlemen* at Torfou and Montaign. I tell you, Monsieur Michel, mark my words, within a fortnight there 'll be trouble."

This time he really took his departure, humming "La Parisienne," for the words and air of which he seemed to have a downright passion.

The young man was left alone with the two dogs.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH THINGS DO NOT COME TO PASS JUST AS
BARON MICHEL HAD DREAMED THAT THEY MIGHT.

OUR love-lorn youth thought at first of following Courtin's first suggestion; that is to say, of sending the dogs to the Marquis de Souday by Rousseau or Belette (weasel) who were two servants, employed partly at the farm and partly at the château, and who owed the nicknames under which Courtin presented them to our readers, — the first to the somewhat high coloring of his hair, and the second to the resemblance which his face bore to that of the animal whose obesity La Fontaine commemorated in one of his most charming fables.

But upon reflection it occurred to the young man that in that case the Marquis de Souday might content himself with a simple letter of thanks, unaccompanied by any invitation.

If the marquis should happen to take that course, the opportunity would have been thrown away; he would be obliged to wait for another to present itself, and they did not come every day.

If, on the other hand, the young man should take the dogs home himself, he would infallibly be received; one does n't let a neighbor travel five or six kilometres to bring back in person dogs which one has given up for lost, and which one values highly, without asking him in to rest for a while, and even to pass the night, if it is late.

Michel drew his watch ; it was a few minutes after six.

We meant to have said that Madame la Baronne Michel had retained, or rather had adopted, the custom of dining at four o'clock. Madame la Baronne Michel's father used to dine at noon.

So the young baron had plenty of time to go to the château if he decided to go.

But it was a serious matter, this of deciding to go to the château, and we have already warned the reader that decision was not M. Michel's predominant characteristic.

He wasted a quarter of an hour in hesitation. Luckily in the early days of May the sun does not set until eight o'clock, so he still had an hour and a half of daylight, and it would be perfectly proper to call any time before nine.

But then it was a hunting day, and would not the young ladies have come home tired out, and retired early ?

Now, it was not the Marquis de Souday whom the young baron desired to see. For him personally he would never think of travelling six kilometres, while it seemed to him that a hundred leagues would be a trifle if he were to see Mary again at the end of it.

So he decided to set off at once.

Then, for the first time, he remembered that he had no hat, and in order to get one he must go back to the château, and risk meeting his mother, and being questioned by her, — "where was he going ?" "whose dogs were those ?"

He needed no hat ; the hat, or rather the lack of a hat, would be attributed to his haste, — the wind had carried it away, the branch of a tree had knocked it into a ravine, and the dogs prevented him from running after it.

It was much more undesirable to face the baronne than to go without his hat. So he set off without it, leading the dogs in leash.

He had barely started before he realized that he would not require the hour and a quarter he had allowed for the journey to Souday.

As soon as the dogs saw what course their guide was taking, he had much more need to hold them back than to lead them.

They smelt the kennel, and tugged at the cord with all their strength; harnessed to a light wagon, they would easily have taken Baron Michel where he wished to go in a half-hour.

Even on foot, with their assistance, by simply taking a short trot, he might expect to make it in three quarters of an hour; and the impatience of the dogs being quite equal to his own, the short trot was the gait adopted.

After about twenty minutes, they came to Machecoul forest; here it was possible to shorten the distance considerably by cross-cuts.

As they entered the forest they had to breast a rather steep incline. The young baron went to the top of it like a thorough-bred athlete; but when he arrived there, he felt the need of a breathing space. It was not so with the dogs, who breathed as they ran, and they manifested a desire to continue their journey.

Their guide resisted this desire by planting his feet as firmly as he could and pulling back while they pulled ahead.

Two equal forces neutralize each other, according to the first principles of mechanics. The young baron's force being superior to either alone, was neutralized by the united force of the two dogs.

The group being finally at rest, he profited by the halt to draw his handkerchief, and wipe his forehead.

While he was so engaged, and enjoying the fresh breeze which blew upon his face from the invisible mouth of the evening, it seemed to him as if a distant shout came down to him on the wind.

The dogs also heard it, and answered with the long dismal howl, which lost dogs are prone to utter.

Then they began to tug at the cord with renewed energy.

Their guide had rested a moment; he had wiped his forehead, and he had no further reason for opposing the manifest desire of Galon d'Or and Allégro to be up and away. Instead of leaning backward, he leaned forward, and resumed the short trot which had been interrupted for a moment.

He had not gone three hundred feet when another shout was heard, nearer than the first, and consequently more distinct. The dogs replied by a more prolonged howl, and a more vigorous pull at the leash.

The young man understood that somebody was looking for the dogs, and was hallooing [*haulait*] for them.

We ask our reader's pardon for introducing in our writings a word which is not recognized by the Académie; but it is the word used by our peasants to describe the special cry by which the hunter calls his dogs. It has the advantage of being expressive; but my last and best reason for using it is that I know no other.

A half-kilometre further on, the same cries were heard for the third time, both from the man seeking, and the animals sought.

This time Galon d'Or and Allégro pulled with such vigor that their conductor was overpowered by them and was compelled to pass from a slow to a fast trot, and thence to a gallop.

Something like five minutes after he had adopted that gait, a man appeared on the edge of the wood, leaped the ditch at a bound, and alighted in the middle of the road, barring the young man's passage.

The man was Jean Oullier.

"Aha!" said he, "so it's you, is it, Monsieur Joli-cœur, who not only turn off my dogs from the wolf I am hunting, to set them on your wretched hare, but who also take the trouble to couple them and lead them in leash?"

"Monsieur," said the young man, gasping for breath, "Monsieur, if I did couple the dogs up and keep them in leash, it was so that I might have the honor of taking them back myself to M. le Marquis de Souday."

"Oh, yes; that's all very fine; to go there hatless and without ceremony! Don't put yourself out, my dear monsieur! Now that you have met me I will take them home myself."

And before M. Michel could make any opposition, indeed before he guessed his purpose, Jean had snatched the cord from his hands, and thrown it over the necks of the dogs, as one throws the rein over a horse's neck. When they found that they were at liberty the dogs darted off at full speed toward the château, followed by Jean Oullier, who ran nearly as fast as they, cracking his whip and shouting,—

"To the kennel, to the kennel, rascals!"

The thing had taken place so rapidly that the dogs and Jean Oullier were already a kilometre away before the baron recovered from his surprise.

He remained standing, speechless, in the road.

He had been standing there perhaps ten minutes with his mouth open, and his eyes staring in the direction taken by Jean Oullier and the dogs, when a girl's voice,

gentle and sweet, uttered these words not two feet from his side:—

"*Jésus Dieu!* Monsieur le Baron, what are you doing here on the highway at this time of night, bareheaded?"

The young man would have been much puzzled to say what he was doing; he was following in thought his hopes which had flown away toward the Château de Souday, but which he did not dare to pursue.

He turned to see who it was that spoke to him, and recognized his foster-sister, the daughter of the farmer Tinguy.

"Ah, is it you, Rosine?" said he. "What are you doing here yourself?"

"Alas! Monsieur le Baron," said the child, with tears in her voice, "I have just come from the château of La Logerie, where I was unkindly received by Madame la Baronne."

"How so, Rosine? You know very well that my mother is fond of you, and has an eye to your welfare."

"Yes, in ordinary times, but not to-day."

"What! not to-day?"

"I mean it! for not more than an hour ago she shut the door on me."

"Why did n't you ask for me?"

"I did, Monsieur le Baron, but they told me you were not at home."

"What! not at home? Why, I have just come out, my dear! and however quickly you may have run, you have n't run so fast as I, I dare swear!"

"Ah, indeed, it's very possible, Monsieur le Baron, because you see when your mother turned me away, it occurred to me that I would go and appeal to the She-wolves; but I did n't make up my mind to do so all at once."

"What have you to ask the — the Wolves for?"

It required an effort for Michel to pronounce the word.

"The same thing which I asked of Madame la Baronne, — help for my poor father, who is very sick."

"What's the matter?"

"He has a malignant fever which he caught in the swamps."

"A malignant fever?" Michel repeated. "Is it intermittent or typhoid?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Monsieur le Baron."

"What does the doctor say?"

"*Dame*, Monsieur le Baron, the doctor lives at Palluau; he won't put himself out for less than a hundred sous, and we are not rich enough to pay a hundred sous for a doctor's visit."

"Did n't my mother give you any money?"

"Why, I tell you she would n't even so much as see me! 'A malignant fever!' she cried; 'she has come to the château when her father has a malignant fever! Drive her away!'"

"It's impossible."

"I heard her myself, Monsieur le Baron, she said it so loud; besides, they did drive me away, so that proves it."

"Wait, wait!" said the young man, eagerly. "I will give you some money, at all events."

And he felt in all his pockets.

But it will be remembered that he had given Courtin all that he had about him.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, "I have n't a sou about me, my poor child! Come back to the château with me, Rosine, and I will give you what you need."

"Oh, no!" said the girl; "I would not go back to the château for all the money in the world. No! my mind is made up, and I will apply to the Wolves; they

are kind-hearted, and won't put a poor child out of doors when she comes to ask help for her dying father."

"But — but," stammered the young man, "they say that they are not wealthy."

"Who?"

"Mesdemoiselles de Souday."

"Oh, I'm not going to ask them for money,— they don't give alms; they do much better than that, God knows."

"Pray, what do they do?"

"They go themselves where sickness is; and if they can't cure the sick man, they comfort the dying and weep with the survivors."

"Yes," said the youth, "when it's an everyday sickness; but in the case of a contagious fever —"

"Do you suppose they think about that? Do kind hearts know such things as contagious fevers? See now, I'm going there, you understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, in ten minutes, if you stay where you are, you will see me pass this way again with one or other of the sisters going back with me to look after my father. *Au revoir*, Monsieur Michel! Ah, I never would have believed it of Madame la Baronne,— to turn away from her door like a thief the daughter of the woman who nursed you!"

She hurried away before the young man could think of a word to say in reply.

But Rosine had said one thing which remained in his heart.

"In ten minutes," she had said, "if you stay where you are, you will see me pass this way again, with one or other of the sisters."

Michel was firmly resolved to stay where he was; the

opportunity which he had lost in one way was about to be presented to him in another.

If chance would only bring Mary back with Rosine ! But how could he believe that a girl of eighteen, daughter of the Marquis de Souday, would leave the house at eight o'clock at night, to go and take care of a poor peasant with malignant fever, a league and a half away ! It was not probable ; it was not even possible.

Rosine made the two sisters out to be better than they really were, just as other people made them worse.

Furthermore, was it credible that Baronne Michel, a pious soul, addicted to all the virtues, could conduct herself under these circumstances so much less creditably than two girls of whom so much evil was said throughout the country-side ?

If it happened as Rosine predicted, must he not believe that the two girls were the ones who acted according to the will of God ?

But, then, of course, neither of them would come.

He was repeating that for the tenth time in ten minutes, when he saw two youthful female forms appear at the turn in the road where Rosine had disappeared.

In spite of the gathering darkness he recognized Rosine, but he found it impossible to make out her companion, who was wrapped in a cloak.

Baron Michel's brain was so confused, and his heart was beating so fast, that his legs refused to carry him toward the two girls, so that he stood and waited for them to come up to him.

"Well, Monsieur le Baron," said Rosine, proudly, "what did I tell you ?"

"What did you tell him ?" asked the figure in the cloak.

Michel sighed, for by its firm, resolute tones he recognized the voice of Bertha.

"I told him," Rosine replied, "that they would n't treat me at your house as they did at the château of La Logerie,—that you would n't turn me away."

"But," Michel suggested, "perhaps you did n't tell Mademoiselle de Souday what your father's disease is."

"From the symptoms," said Bertha, "it seems to me very like a typhoid fever. That's why we ought not to lose a moment; it's a disease which needs to be taken in time. Are you coming with us, Monsieur Michel?"

"Why, mademoiselle," was the reply, "typhoid fever is contagious!"

"Some say it is, and some say it is n't," said Bertha, carelessly.

"But it's a fatal disease," Michel persisted.

"In many cases; however there have been some cures."

The young man drew Bertha aside.

"Are you really going to expose yourself to such a risk?" he asked.

"To be sure."

"For somebody you don't know,—a mere stranger?"

"He who is a stranger to us," replied Bertha with supreme gentleness, "is to other poor creatures, a father or brother or husband! There is no such thing as a stranger in this world, Mousieur Michel! And this poor man is something to you, is he not?"

"He's my foster-mother's husband," stammered Michel.

"You see," retorted Bertha, "that you were wrong to speak of him as a stranger."

"That was why I offered to return to the château with Rosine; I would have given her money so that she could get a doctor."

"And you declined, preferring to apply to us?" said Bertha. "Thank you, Rosine."

The young man was dumfounded. He had heard a good deal about charity, but had never seen it; and lo! it suddenly appeared to him in all its beauty in the person of Bertha.

He followed them pensively, with bent head.

"If you are coming with us," said Bertha, "will you be kind enough, Monsieur Michel, to help us by carrying this little box of medicines?"

"But M. le Baron is not coming with us," said Rosine. "He knows how afraid Madame de la Logerie is of malignant fevers."

"You are wrong, Rosine," said the baron, "I am coming," and he took from Bertha's hand the box she had mentioned.

An hour later they reached the cabin of Rosine's father.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOSTER-FATHER.

THIS cabin was situated, not in the village itself, but about a gun-shot away from it; it was on the edge of a little wood, with which it communicated by a back door.

Goodman Tinguy — so Rosine's father was commonly called — was a Chouan of the old stock. When a mere child he had fought in the first Vendean war, under Jolly, Couëtu, Charette, and La Rochejaquelein.

He had married, and was the father of two children; the elder was a son who was serving at this time in the army, by force of the conscription; the other was Rosine.

At the birth of each of them the mother — as poor peasants commonly do — had taken a child to nurse.

The foster-brother of young Tinguy was the last scion of a noble family of Maine; his name was Henri de Bonneville, and he will soon make his appearance in these pages.

Rosine's foster-brother was, as we already know, Michel de la Logerie, one of the principal actors in our drama.

Henri de Bonneville was two years older than Michel; the two children had often played together before that door which Michel was just about to enter, in the wake of Rosine and Bertha.

Later they had met at Paris. Madame de la Logerie had smiled most benignly upon her son's friendship with

a young man, who was a personage of much consequence in the western provinces, both on account of his fortune and his birth.

The two nurslings had brought some little pecuniary ease to the Tinguy household; but the Vendean peasant is so constituted that he never admits that he is in comfortable circumstances, and Tinguy, sick as he was, would have thought a long while before sending to Palluau for a doctor whose visit would have cost five francs.

Moreover, all peasants, and the Vendean peasants more especially, have an entire disbelief in the merits of doctors and medicine. That is why Rosine had applied first at the château of La Logerie, where her right of entry as Michel's foster-sister had hitherto been undisputed, and why, when repulsed there, she had had recourse to the Souday young ladies.

On hearing the noise made by the three young people coming in, the sick man raised himself in bed with much difficulty, but he immediately fell back with a deep groan. A candle was burning in the room, but lighted only the spot where the bed stood, all the rest of the room being in shadow. By that wan light a man about forty years of age could be seen lying on a sort of pallet, and engaged in a fierce struggle with the demon of fever.

He was pale to lividity; his eye was glassy and dull, and from time to time his whole body quivered from head to foot as if it had come in contact with a galvanic battery.

Michel shuddered at the sight, and realized how it was that his mother, with an intuitive conception of the sick man's condition, had hesitated to admit Rosine, knowing that the poor girl must be impregnated with the poisonous germs which were floating, almost visible,

around the dying man's bed, and in the little circle of light which surrounded it.

He thought of camphor, chlorine, thieves' vinegar, and all the other disinfectants which may be useful to a well man in the presence of contagious disease; and having neither vinegar, chlorine, nor camphor, he remained near the door, so that he might at least be in communication with the outer air.

But Bertha thought of none of those things; she went straight to the bed, and took the sick man's scorching hand in hers.

The young man made a movement to stop her, and opened his mouth to utter an exclamation; but he stood in a measure petrified by her fearless charity, and was lost in a sort of terrified admiration.

Bertha questioned the sick man, who described his experiences thus:—

The preceding day, when he rose in the morning, he had felt so tired that his legs gave way under him when he got out of bed. It was a warning given him by Nature; but peasants rarely follow her advice. Instead of going back to bed and sending for a doctor, Tinguy finished dressing, and making a determined effort to overcome his indisposition, went down cellar and brought up a pot of cider; then he cut a slice of bread for himself, — his idea being that he must *give himself strength*.

He drank his mug of cider with enjoyment, but could not swallow a crumb of bread.

Then he went to his work in the fields.

On the way he was attacked with a violent headache and profuse bleeding at the nose. His extreme weariness became intense pain in the chest and back and legs; two or three times he had to sit down. He came

to two springs on his road, and drank deeply of each; but his thirst, instead of moderating, became so intense that he drank some water standing in a wagon rut.

At last he reached his field; but then he had not strength enough to thrust his spade into the ground. He stood for a few seconds, leaning on his instrument; then his head began to whirl, and he lay down, or rather fell down, completely prostrated.

He lay there till seven o'clock in the evening, and would have lain in the same place all night, if a peasant from the village of Légé had not chanced to pass near him. He saw a man lying on the ground, and called him. He did not reply, but moved slightly; whereupon the peasant approached and recognized Tinguay.

With great difficulty he succeeded in getting the sick man home. He was so weak that it took him more than an hour to walk half a league.

Rosine was anxiously awaiting him. She was terrified at her father's appearance, and wanted to run off to Palluau for the doctor; but the good man positively forbade her, and went to bed saying that it would amount to nothing, and that he should be all right the next day. But as his thirst, instead of growing less, seemed to increase all the time, he told Rosine to put a pitcher of water on a chair by his bed.

He had passed the night in that state, consumed by fever, and drinking every instant without being able to extinguish the fire which was burning him up. In the morning he tried to get up as usual, but could scarcely reach a sitting posture. His head, in which he felt horrible shooting pains, turned around with him, and he complained of severe pain in his right side.

Rosine had insisted again upon going for M. Roger, — the doctor at Palluau, — but her father had again posi-

tively forbidden her to do so; so the poor child stayed by his bedside, ready to attend to his wants and help him as best she could.

His most intense craving was for water, and his demands for it were incessant.

Rosine remained with him until four in the afternoon, when he said, shaking his head, —

“ Well, I see that I have an attack of malignant fever, and you must go and seek a remedy from the kind lady at the château.”

The result of this decision we know.

Having felt the invalid's pulse, and listened to this story, which he told with much difficulty and a gasping voice, Bertha, counting up to one hundred and twenty pulsations a minute, realized that Goodman Tinguy was indeed in the throes of a violent fever.

But this question remained to be decided, What was the nature of the fever? — and that she knew too little of medicine to decide.

But as the invalid kept up a ceaseless cry of “ drink! drink!” she cut a lemon in halves, boiled it in a large pot of water, sweetened the decoction slightly, and gave it to the goodman instead of pure water.

When the time came to sweeten the mixture, Rosine told her that there was no sugar in the house, — sugar is the acme of luxury for the Vendean peasant! Luckily the thoughtful Bertha had put a small quantity in the box which contained her little store of drugs.

She looked about for the box, and saw it under Michel's arm, who was still standing near the door.

She motioned to him to come to her; but before he had stirred from his place, she made another sign which signified that he was to stay where he was.

Then she came to him with her finger on her lip.

"This man's condition," she said in a very low tone, so that the invalid should not hear, "is very serious, and I don't dare to take anything upon myself. The presence of a doctor is absolutely necessary, and even then I fear he may arrive too late. While I give the poor man a sedative, do you run to Palluau, dear Monsieur Michel, and bring back Doctor Roger."

"But you — you?" asked the young baron, anxiously.

"I shall stay here; you will find me here when you return. I have important matters to talk over with the sick man."

"Important matters?" queried Michel in surprise.

"Yes," replied Bertha.

"But —" the young man was going on.

"I tell you," interposed the girl, "every moment's delay may have most serious consequences. Taken in time, this species of fever is often fatal; but taken at the stage at which this one has arrived, they are almost invariably so. Go, then, without losing a minute; and don't lose a minute either about bringing back the doctor."

"But if the fever is contagious?" the young man asked.

"Well, what then?" said Bertha.

"Aren't you running the risk of taking it?"

"My dear monsieur," said Bertha, "if one thought about such things as that, half of our peasants would die without help. Go, and ask God to watch over me."

She held out her hand to the messenger.

The youth took the hand she extended, and was so carried away by the admiration aroused in him by such simple yet superb courage in a woman, which he, man that he was, felt himself incapable of, that he pressed his lips upon it in a sort of passion.

The movement was so sudden, and so unexpected, that Bertha started, became deadly pale, and sighed as she said, —

“Go, my friend, go!”

She had no need to repeat her commands, for Michel darted from the cabin at once. An unwonted fire seemed to shoot through his whole body, and to double his vital force. He felt a curious kind of strength, as if he could accomplish miracles; it seemed to him as if, like the Mercury of old, he had wings on his head and his heels. Had a wall barred his passage, he would have scaled it; had a river stretched before him, without bridge or ford, he would have jumped in and swam across without stopping to think about removing his clothes.

He regretted that it was such a simple thing which Bertha had asked him to do; he longed for something difficult, — yea, even impossible for ordinary mortals.

Why should Bertha be grateful to him for simply going a league and a quarter to call a doctor? Instead of that two leagues and a half, he would have liked to go to the end of the world for her.

He would have been only too glad to give himself some proof of heroism which would allow him to think of his own courage as on a level with Bertha's.

It can readily be imagined that in the young baron's exalted state he did not think of fatigue. The league and a quarter which lay between Légé and Palluau were covered in less than half an hour.

Doctor Roger was a familiar guest at the Château of La Logerie, which was hardly an hour's walk from Palluau. The young baron had only to give his name, and the doctor, ignorant that the patient was a simple peasant, leaped out of bed and shouted to his caller that he would be ready in five minutes.

At the end of that time he entered his salon, asking the young man the reason of his unexpected nocturnal visit.

In two words Michel explained the situation to the doctor; and as M. Roger was much astonished to find him taking such an eager interest in a mere peasant as to come on foot in the middle of the night, with trembling voice and perspiration on his forehead, to call a doctor for that patient's benefit, the young Baron de la Logerie attributed his interest to the bond of affection which attached him to the sick man, who was his foster-father.

Being questioned by the doctor as to the symptoms, Michel repeated faithfully all that he had heard, begging M. Roger to take with him the necessary medicines, — the village of Légé not having yet reached a sufficiently advanced stage of civilization to possess a pharmacy.

Seeing how the young baron was reeking with perspiration, and learning that he had come on foot, the doctor, who had already ordered his horse to be saddled, changed the order, telling his servant to hitch him to his gig.

Michel tried to prevent the change. He maintained that he could go more quickly on foot than the doctor could drive, — he felt such a superabundance of youthful vigor and courage.

The doctor insisted, but Michel refused to listen to him, and put an end to the discussion by rushing out of the house, crying to the doctor, —

"Come as fast as you can. I will go on ahead and tell them you're coming."

The doctor thought that Madame la Baronne Michel's son must have gone mad. He said to himself that he

would soon overtake^h him, and did not recall his order to have his horse put in the gig.

It was the idea of appearing before the fair maiden's eyes in a gig which disturbed our amorous youth.

It seemed to him that Bertha would be much more grateful for his celerity if she should see him return at the top of his speed, and open the cabin door, crying, "Here I am! the doctor is coming behind me!" than if he should arrive in the gig with the doctor.

To gallop up to the door, mounted on a gallant steed, with mane and tail flying in the wind, breathing fire through his nostrils, and announcing his presence by loud neighing, — that would be a different matter; but in a gig!

A hundred times better arrive on foot.

A first love is so poetic a thing that it holds everything that is prosaic in utter abhorrence.

What would Mary say when Bertha told her that she had sent the young baron for Doctor Roger at Palluau, and that he had driven back in the doctor's gig!

As we have said, better ten, twenty, a hundred times, arrive on foot!

The young man realized that in the stage-setting of a first love, a perspiring brow, glowing eyes, heaving chest, dust upon the clothing, horses left far in the rear, all was very appropriate, and as it should be.

As for the sick man, *mon Dieu!* he was almost forgotten, we confess, in all this feverish excitement. It was not of him that Michel was thinking, but of the two sisters. It was not for him that he was running his legs off at the rate of three leagues an hour, but for Bertha and Mary.

The principal cause in this grand physiological cataclysm which was taking place in our hero, had become

a mere accessory; it was no longer the motive of his excursion, but the pretext for it.

Michel, calling himself Hippomenes, and struggling for the prize with Atalanta, had no need, in order to win the prize, to drop the golden apples along the road.

He laughed disdainfully at the idea of the doctor urging his horse in the expectation of overtaking him. He felt an indescribable glow of pleasure as the cool night wind blew upon his moist brow.

Overtaken by the doctor! He would prefer to die rather than to be overtaken.

He had taken half an hour to go to Palluau; he made the return journey in twenty-five minutes.

As if she had divined his marvellous speed, Bertha came to the door to await her messenger. She knew very well that in all human probability he would not return for half an hour, at the very least, and yet she listened.

She thought she could hear footfalls, almost imperceptible, in the distance.

It was impossible that it could be the young baron, and yet she never dreamed of doubting that it was he.

And in an instant she saw his form emerge from the darkness, just as he, with his eyes fixed upon the door, but hardly believing his eyes, distinguished her standing motionless with her hand upon her heart, which, for the first time in her life, beat with unwonted violence.

On reaching her side, the youth, like the Greek at Marathon, was voiceless and breathless; and he was very near falling, as the Greek did, in a swoon at least, if not dead.

He had just strength enough to say, —

“The doctor is behind me.”

Then he leaned against the house to keep from falling.

If he could have spoken, he would have cried, "You will tell Mademoiselle Mary, will you not, that for love of her and you I have made two leagues and a half in fifty minutes?" But he could not speak. So Bertha was led to think, and did think, that it was for love of herself alone that her envoy had performed his miraculous feat.

She smiled joyously, and drew her handkerchief from her pocket.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" she said, wiping the young man's face with gentle hand, and taking great care not to touch the wound on his forehead, "I am very sorry that you took so to heart my request to you to make haste. A pretty state you're in!"

Then, like a mother chiding, she added, with an exquisitely tender accent and a slight shrug of her shoulders, —

"Child that you are!"

The word "child" was uttered with such inexpressible sweetness of intonation that it made Michel start.

He seized Bertha's hand, which was moist and trembling.

At this moment they heard the wheels of the gig coming along the road.

"Ah, there's the doctor!" exclaimed Bertha, pushing Michel's hand away.

He gazed at her wonderingly. Why did she push his hand away? It was impossible for him to understand what was going on in the girl's heart; but he had an instinctive feeling that, although she had pushed his hand away, the movement was not dictated by hatred or dislike or wrath.

Bertha re-entered the house, doubtless to announce

the doctor's arrival to the sick man, while Michel remained at the door to receive him.

As he watched him drive up in the wicker-carriage which shook him about in such a ridiculous way, Michel congratulated himself more warmly than ever upon his decision to make the journey on foot.

It is true that if Bertha had gone into the house at the sound of the wheels, as she had just done, she would not have seen him in the vulgar conveyance. But if she had not previously seen Michel, would she not have waited outside until she did see him?

He said to himself that it was more than likely; and if he did not feel in his heart the kindling flame of love, he did at least experience an agreeable tickling of his self-esteem.

CHAPTER XII.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

WHEN the doctor entered the sick-room, Bertha had resumed her place at the bedside.

The first object which met M. Roger's eye was her graceful figure, reminding him of the angels of a German fable who hover in the air to receive the souls of the dying.

But he at once recognized the young girl; for it was a rare thing for him to visit the hut of a poor peasant without finding her or her sister standing between death and the dying.

"Oh, doctor!" said she, "come, quick! poor Tinguy is delirious!"

The invalid seemed indeed to be greatly excited as the doctor drew near.

"Come, my good fellow," said he, "be calm!"

"Leave me!" exclaimed the sick man; "leave me! I must get up; they expect me at Montaign."

"No, my dear Tinguy," said Bertha; "they don't expect you yet —"

"Yes, they do, mademoiselle, indeed they do! This is the night. Who will go from château to château with the news, if I am not on hand?"

"Hush, Tinguy! hush!" said Bertha. "Remember that you are sick, and that Doctor Roger is standing here beside you."

"Doctor Roger is one of us, mademoiselle; we can talk freely before him. He knows that they are waiting for

me; he knows that I must get up immediately, and go to Montaign.

Doctor Roger and Bertha exchanged a rapid glance.

"Massa," said the doctor.

"Marseilles," she replied.

Whereupon they both, as by a common impulse, extended and clasped hands.

Bertha returned to the sick man.

"Yes, you are right," she whispered in his ear, — "yes, Doctor Roger is one of us; but there is some one here who is not. That some one," she added in a still lower tone, so that none but Tinguy could possibly hear, "is the young Baron de la Logerie."

"True, true, he is n't with us," said the goodman. "Say nothing to him. Courtin is a traitor. But if I don't go to Montaign, who will go?"

"Jean Oullier! never fear, Tinguy."

"Oh, if Jean Oullier goes," said the sick man, "there's no need of my going! He has a swift foot, and a sharp eye, and is a first-class shot!"

He burst into a laugh, which seemed to exhaust his small store of strength, and he fell back upon the bed.

The young baron had listened to the conversation, but had overheard only a few scattered sentences, which conveyed no idea to his mind.

But he had heard the words, "Courtin is a traitor," and had guessed that they were speaking about Courtin in connection with himself, because the young girl glanced in his direction.

He approached with heart oppressed, to think that there was a secret which he was not admitted to share.

"Mademoiselle," said he to Bertha, "if my presence is an embarrassment, or if you have no further need of me, say the word, and I will retire."

There was such a world of melancholy in these few words that Bertha's heart was touched.

"No," she said; "no, stay. On the contrary, we still need you; you must assist Rosine to prepare M. Roger's prescriptions, while I talk with him of the treatment to be followed with our patient. — Keep them busy," she added, in an undertone, to the physician; "then you can tell me what you know, and I will tell you what I know."

Then she turned again to Michel, and said in her sweetest voice, —

"Would you not like to help Rosine, my friend?"

"Whatever pleases you, mademoiselle," the young man replied; "command, and you shall be obeyed."

"You see, doctor," said Bertha, "you have two assistants, only too ready to help."

The doctor ran to his carriage and took out a bottle of Sedlitz water, and a bag of mustard flour.

"Here," said he, handing the bottle to the baron, "pour that out, and give the patient half a glass of it every ten minutes."

To Rosine he passed the bag of mustard, saying as he did so, —

"Mix this in boiling water; it's to put at your father's feet."

The sick man had relapsed into the comatose state which had preceded the momentary agitation, allayed only when Bertha promised that Jean Oullier should take his place.

The doctor looked closely at him, and seeing that it was safe to leave him for the moment to the care of the young baron, he walked quickly to where Bertha was.

"Come, Mademoiselle de Souday," said he, "since we

have discovered that we are of the same way of thinking, tell me what you know."

"Why, that Madame left Massa on the 21st of April last, and that she should have landed at Marseilles on the 29th or 30th. It is now the 6th of May; Madame should be in France, and the South should be fully aroused."

"Is that all you know?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, all," replied Bertha.

"You have n't seen the papers of the evening of the 3d?"

Bertha smiled.

"We don't receive newspapers at the Château de Souday," said she.

"Well," said the doctor, "the whole thing has fallen through!"

"What do you say? — fallen through?"

"Madame's plan has miscarried completely."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* what do you mean?"

"It's the simple truth. Madame, after a safe passage on the 'Carlo-Alberto,' landed some leagues from Marseilles; a guide awaited her, and conducted her to an isolated house surrounded by woods and cliffs. Madame had but six persons with her —"

"Go on, go on, I am listening!"

"She immediately despatched one of them to Marseilles to say to the leader of the plot that she was on shore, and was awaiting the performance of the promises which had brought her to France."

"Well?"

"At evening the messenger returned with a letter congratulating the princesse on her safe arrival, and announcing that Marseilles would rise for her the next day."

"What then?"

"Well, the next day the attempt was made, but Marseilles took no part in it; so that it failed utterly."

"And Madame?"

"Nobody knows where she is; they hope that she went aboard the 'Carlo-Alberto' again."

"The cowards!" muttered Bertha. "Oh, I am only a woman, but if Madame had come to La Vendée, I swear to God that I would have set an example to certain men! Adieu, doctor, and thank you."

"You are leaving us?"

"It is very important that my father should know these details. There was to be a meeting at the Château de Montaigu this evening. I must return to Souday. I commend my poor invalid to you; you will look after him, won't you? Leave definite directions what is to be done for him; either my sister or I will come, unless something new turns up, and pass to-morrow night with him."

"Will you take my carriage? I will go home on foot, and to-morrow you can send it back to me by Jean Oullier or some one else."

"No, thanks! I don't know where Jean Oullier may be to-morrow; besides, I prefer to walk. I am almost stifled, and the walk will do me good."

Bertha extended her hand, pressed the doctor's with masculine strength, threw her cloak over her shoulders, and left the room.

But at the door she found Michel, who, although he had heard nought of the conversation, had not lost sight of the girl for a moment, and guessing that she was about to leave the house, had made for the door.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he said; "what is going on, pray, and what have you learned?"

"Nothing," said Bertha.

"Oho! nothing? If you had n't learned something, you would not be going off in this way, without giving me a thought, without a word or gesture of farewell to me."

"Why should I say farewell to you, when you are going with me?"

"What! will you permit me?"

"To go back with me? Why, after all I have made you do to-night, it's your right, my dear monsieur, — always supposing that you are not too tired."

"I too tired, mademoiselle, when I have an opportunity to go with you? Why, with you or Mademoiselle Mary I would go to the end of the world! Tired? Oh, never!"

Bertha smiled, and murmured with a sidelong glance at the young baron, —

"Oh, what a pity that he is not one of us!"

But in a moment she added, smiling again, —

"Pshaw! with such a character, he will be whatever one chooses to have him."

"You seem to be speaking to me," said Michel, "and yet I don't hear what you are saying."

"That's because I am speaking to you in a very low tone."

"Why do you speak in that low tone?"

"Because what I am saying cannot be said aloud, at least not just yet."

"But later?" the young man asked.

"Ah, later, perhaps —"

The young man, at this, moved his lips, but the movement was not followed by any sound.

"Well," said Bertha, "what's the meaning of that pantomime?"

"That I am speaking very low to you in my turn, with this difference, however, that what I am saying so low, I would say aloud and at this moment if I dared —"

"I am not like other women," said Bertha, with a smile that was almost disdainful, "and one may say to me aloud what one has to say."

"Very well then, this is what I was saying to you beneath my breath: That I am very, very sorry to see you going forward into certain danger, — as certain as it is useless."

"Of what danger are you speaking, dear neighbor?" asked the young girl, in a somewhat bantering tone.

"Of that which you and Doctor Roger were talking about just now. There is to be a rising in La Vendée."

"Really?"

"You will not deny it, I hope."

"I! and why should I deny it?"

"Your father and you are concerned in it."

"You forget my sister," said Bertha, laughingly.

"Oh, no, I forget nobody," said Michel, with a sigh.

"Well? what then?"

"Let me tell you, as an affectionate, a devoted friend, that you are wrong."

"And why am I wrong, may I ask, my affectionate and devoted friend?" rejoined Bertha, with that touch of raillery which she could not entirely hold in check.

"Because La Vendée is not in 1832 what it was in 1793; I ought rather to say, Because La Vendée no longer exists."

"So much the worse for La Vendée! But, by good luck, there is still a nobility, Monsieur Michel; and there is another thing, which you perhaps do not yet know, but which your descendants in the fifth or sixth generation will know, — that *noblesse oblige*."

The baron felt the thrust, and made a movement as if to speak.

"Now let us talk of something else, if you please," said Bertha; "for on that point I have no reply to make to you, since (as poor Tinguy said) you are not one of us."

"But what do you want me to talk about?" said the young man, dismayed by Bertha's sternness.

"What do I want you to talk about? Why, of anything under heaven! It's a magnificent night; talk to me about the night. The moon is shining brightly; talk to me about the moon. The stars seem to be on fire; talk to me about the stars. The sky is without a cloud; talk to me about the sky."

And the maiden threw back her head and fixed her eyes upon the starry firmament.

Michel sighed deeply, and walked along by her side without a word. What could he find to say to her — he, the man of cities and of books — in the presence of lovely nature, which seemed her own kingdom? Had he been, as Bertha had, brought face to face from childhood with all the wonders of creation? Had he seen, as she had, all the successive phases of the birth of the morning, and the setting of the sun? Was he familiar, as she was, with all the mysterious whisperings of the night? When the sky-lark sounded the morning *reveillé* of Nature, did he know what the sky-lark said? When the nightingale filled the darkness with her melodious strains, did he know what words she sang? No; his brain was crammed with scientific facts which Bertha did not know; but Bertha knew all of the secrets of Nature, which was a sealed book to Michel.

Oh, if she had but chosen to speak, how earnestly would he have listened!

Unfortunately, however, Bertha said nothing; her heart was full of those thoughts which find expression in looks and sighs, not in words.

Michel, meanwhile, lost himself in reverie.

He saw himself walking beside the gentle Mary, instead of plodding along beside the stern, rough Bertha; in place of the isolation which Bertha in her strength imposed upon him, he seemed to feel Mary leaning on his arm in sweet and trusting companionship.

Oh, then words would have come readily to his lips! Then he would have found a thousand things to say of the night, of the moon and stars and the cloudless sky!

With Mary he would have been the instructor and the master.

With Bertha he was the slave.

The two young persons had been walking along thus side by side for a quarter of an hour, both in perfect silence, when Bertha suddenly stopped, and motioned to Michel to follow her example.

He obeyed; with Bertha implicit obedience was his *rôle*.

"Do you hear anything?" she asked.

"No," said Michel, shaking his head.

"I do," said Bertha, with glistening eye, and ears strained.

"What do you hear?"

"The step of my horse and Mary's; they are looking for me. Something has happened."

She listened again.

"It's Mary looking for me," she said.

"How can you be sure of that?" asked Michel.

"By the way the horses are galloping. Let us go faster, please."

The sounds rapidly approached, and in five minutes

a little group emerged from the darkness. It consisted of two horses, and a female mounted on one of them, and leading the other by the rein.

"I told you it was my sister," said Bertha.

The young man had, in fact, recognized Mary, less by the girlish figure, which had become visible, than by the tumultuous beating of his heart.

Mary had also recognized him, as was easy to see by the astonished gesture that escaped her.

It was evident that she expected to find her sister alone, or with Rosine, — certainly not with the young baron.

Michel noted her surprise at his presence, and advanced to her side.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I met your sister on her way to do what she could for Tinguay, and I went with her, so that she might not be alone."

"You did perfectly right, monsieur," said Mary.

"You don't understand," laughed Bertha; "he thinks that he ought to apologize for me, or perhaps for himself. We can forgive him a good deal, poor boy, for his mamma will give him a jolly scolding!"

Then she took hold of Mary's saddle bow and asked her in an undertone, —

"What's the matter, Blondine?"

"The Marseilles rising has failed."

"I know it. Madame has gone to sea again."

"No; that's where you're wrong."

"Wrong?"

"Yes, Madame declared that as long as she had come to France, she would not leave it again."

"Really?"

"So that at this moment she is on the way to La Vendée, if not already here."

"How did you learn this?"

"By a message received at the Château de Montaignu this evening, during the meeting, and just when everybody was in the depths of despair."

"Brave soul!" cried Bertha, enthusiastically.

"So father came home as fast as his horse would bring him; and when he learned where you were, he told me to take the horses and come after you."

"Well, here I am!" said Bertha; and she put her foot in the stirrup.

"Well, well," said Mary, "are n't you going to say adieu to your poor cavalier?"

"Of course."

Bertha held out her hand to the youth, who came forward slowly and sadly.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Bertha," he murmured as he took her hand, "I am very unhappy!"

"About what?" she asked him.

"Because I am not one of you, as you said just now."

"Well, what prevents your becoming one of us?" asked Mary, extending her hand to him.

The young man pounced upon it, and kissed it with a fervor born of the twofold emotion of love and gratitude.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," he whispered, so low that Mary alone could hear, "for you and with you!"

But Mary's hand was in some sort torn from his grasp by a sudden movement on the part of her horse. Bertha, in touching her own mount with her heel, had struck her sister's on the flank with her whip.

Horses and riders set off at a gallop, and vanished in the darkness like ghosts.

Michel remained alone, standing like a graven image in the middle of the road.

"Adieu!" cried Bertha.

"*Au revoir!*" cried Mary.

"Oh, yes, yes," said he, stretching out his arms in the direction they had taken; "yes, *au revoir! au revoir!*"

The girls finished their journey without exchanging a word, until they were at the door of the château, when Bertha said, —

"Mary, I know you will laugh at me."

"Why so?" asked Mary, trembling in spite of herself.

"I love him," said Bertha.

A cry of pain almost found its way out between Mary's lips, but she had the strength to keep it back.

"And I cried '*au revoir!*' to him!" said she to herself. "God grant that I may never see him again!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE COUSIN FROM FIFTY LEAGUES AWAY.

ON the morrow of the day on which the events we have just described took place,—that is to say on the 7th of May 1832,—there was a great gathering at the Château de Vouillé.

They were celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Madame la Comtesse de Vouillé, who had completed her twenty-fourth year.

They had just taken their places at table; and around the festive board, on which twenty-five or six covers were laid, were seated the prefect of La Vienne, and the mayor of Châtellerault, both more or less distantly related to Madame de Vouillé.

The soup had just been removed, when a servant entered and said a few words in a low tone into the ear of M. de Vouillé, who made him say them over several times.

Then he said to his guests.

“Be good enough to excuse me a moment; there’s a lady at the door who is travelling post, and who insists, it seems, on speaking with me alone. Have I your leave to go and see what she wishes of me?”

Leave was granted the comte unanimously, but Madame de Vouillé followed her husband with her eyes with some uneasiness.

M. de Vouillé rushed to the door, where a carriage was standing.

It contained two persons, a man and a woman.

A servant in sky-blue livery with silver lace was beside the postilion.

As he spied M. de Vouillé, whom he seemed to be awaiting with some impatience, the servant leaped quickly to the ground.

"Come, hurry up, dawdler!" he cried, as soon as he saw that the comte was within hearing.

M. de Vouillé stopped short, astonished to the point of stupefaction.

Who in heaven's name was this lackey who ventured to apostrophize him in such fashion?

He was preparing to give the rascal a thrashing, when he suddenly began to laugh heartily.

"What! is it you, De Lussac?" he asked.

"Certainly, it's I."

"What does this mummary mean?"

The pseudo-domestic opened the carriage-door, and offered his arm to the female inmate to assist her to alight.

"My dear comte," said he, "I have the honor of presenting to you Madame la Duchesse de Berry."

Then he turned to the duchesse:—

"Madame la Duchesse, M. le Comte de Vouillé, one of my best friends, and one of your most devoted servants."

The comte fell back a step.

"Madame la Duchesse de Berry!" he cried, in utter amazement.

"Herself, monsieur," said the duchesse.

"Are n't you proud and happy to receive her royal Highness?" De Lussac demanded.

"As proud and happy as an ardent Royalist can be; but —"

"What! is there a *but*?" asked the duchesse.

"Why, to-day is my wife's birthday, and I have twenty-five people at my table!"

"Well, monsieur, there is a French proverb which says that 'where there's enough for two, there's enough for three.' You can extend its application, so that it will run, 'where there's enough for twenty-five, there's enough for twenty-eight;' for I give you fair warning that M. le Baron de Lussac, although he is my lackey for the time being, expects to dine at the master's table, as he is famishing."

"Oh, never fear; I will take off my livery," said the baron.

M. de Vouillé seized his hair with both hands, all ready to tear it out.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" he cried.

"Come," said the duchesse, "let us talk sensibly."

"Oh, yes, let us do so," said the comte; "the moment is well chosen, for I am half mad."

"Not with joy, I am afraid," said the duchesse.

"With terror, madame!"

"Oh, you exaggerate the situation."

"Why, madame, just consider; I have the prefect of La Vienne and the mayor of Châtellerault at my table."

"Well, you shall introduce me to them."

"By what name, for God's sake?"

"As your cousin. You have a cousin who lives fifty leagues from here."

"Oh, what a brilliant thought, madame!"

"It's all right!"

"Why, I really have a cousin at Toulouse,—Madame de la Myre."

"That's just what we want! I am Madame de la Myre."

Thereupon she turned to the carriage, and offered her arm to an old man of some sixty years, who was awaiting the end of the discussion before making his appearance.

"Come, Monsieur de la Myre, come," said she; "this is a surprise we have arranged for our good cousin, to arrive just in time for his wife's anniversary. Come, cousin," she added, gayly passing her arm through M. de Vouillé's.

"Come on," said the comte, deciding to risk the adventure which the duchesse entered into with such zest; "come on!"

"I'm coming, too," cried the Baron de Lussac, who had transformed the carriage into a dressing-room and was exchanging his sky-blue livery for a black coat. "Do you happen to have forgotten me?"

"Who the devil will you be?" asked M. de Vouillé.

"*Pardieu!* I will be the Baron de Lussac, and your cousin's cousin, if Madame will permit."

"Hola! hola! Monsieur le Baron!" said the old gentleman who was the duchesse's companion, "it seems to me that you take too many liberties."

"Pshaw! in the country," said the duchesse.

"Campaigning, you mean!" said De Lussac.¹

Meanwhile he had finished his transformation, and it was his turn to say, "Come on!"

M. de Vouillé, who led the column, boldly directed his steps toward the dining-room.

The curiosity of the guests, and the uneasiness of the mistress of the house, had increased in intensity as the comte's absence was prolonged immeasurably.

So when the door of the dining-room opened, all eyes were turned upon the new arrivals.

¹ An untranslatable play upon words. The duchesse said, "*à la campagne*," and De Lussac replied, "*en campagne*, you mean."

However difficult the parts that the actors had to play, they did not lose their self-possession.

"My dear," said the comte to his wife, "I have often spoken to you of a cousin of mine who lives in the suburbs of Toulouse."

"Madame de la Myre?" the comtesse eagerly interposed.

"Yes, Madame de la Myre. Well, she is on her way to Nantes, and did not want to pass right by my house without making your acquaintance. Chance willed that she should come on your birthday. I hope it will bring her good luck."

"Dear cousin!" said the duchesse, opening her arms to Madame de Vouillé; and the two ladies embraced.

As for the gentlemen of the party, M. de Vouillé said simply, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all, —

"M. de la Myre — M. de Lussac," and there was a general bending of heads.

"Now," said M. de Vouillé, "it behooves us to make room for the new-comers, who make no secret of the fact that they are dying with hunger."

There was a general movement; and as the table was very large, and each guest had plenty of room, it was not difficult to make three more places.

"Did you not tell me that you have Monsieur the Prefect of La Vienne to dinner, dear cousin?" asked the duchesse.

"Why, yes, madame; he's the worthy citizen yonder at the right of the comtesse, with spectacles, a white cravat, and the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole."

"Oh, pray present me to him!"

M. de Vouillé had plunged boldly into the comedy, and thought it best to carry it through.

He went up to the prefect, who was sitting majestically upright in his chair.

"Monsieur le Préfet," said he, "my good cousin, with traditional respect for authority, thinks that a general introduction is hardly sufficient in respect of you, and wishes to be presented to you specially."

"Generally, specially, and officially, Madame will always be welcome," replied the gallant functionary.

"I accept the omen, monsieur," said the duchesse.

"Madame is going to Nantes?" said the prefect, for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, monsieur, and thence to Paris, — at least, I hope so."

"This will not be Madame's first visit to the capital?"

"No, monsieur. I lived there twelve years."

"And Madame left Paris —?"

"Oh, much against my will, I promise you!"

"Long ago?"

"It will be two years in July."

"I understand that when one has lived in Paris —"

"One longs to return! I am very glad that you understand that."

"Oh, Paris! Paris!" ejaculated the magistrate.

"You are right; it is the earthly paradise," the duchesse replied, turning her head hastily aside, for she felt the tears coming to her eyes.

"Come, come, let's to the table!" said M. de Vouillé.

"Oh, my dear cousin," said the duchesse, with a glance toward the place intended for her, "please let me sit beside M. le Préfet; he has just expressed sentiments so closely in accord with the most eager wish of my heart that his name is already written among my friends."

The prefect, delighted with the compliment, gladly

moved his chair, and Madame was installed at his left, in utter disregard of any prior rights of the person who had occupied that position.

The two gentlemen took their places quietly in the seats that were designated for them, and were soon busily engaged, especially M. de Lussac, in doing full justice to the feast, as they had promised to do.

As every one followed M. de Lussac's example, there ensued one of those intervals of solemn silence which rarely occur, except at the beginning of a dinner which has been a long time on the way.

Madame first broke the spell. Her adventurous spirit was, like the sea-fowl, most at home in the storm.

"Well, well," said she, "our arrival seems to have interrupted the conversation. Nothing is so gloomy as a dinner-party where nobody talks; I abhor such, my dear comte. I give you fair warning; they are too much like the formal state dinners at Versailles, where they say no one speaks until the king has spoken. You were talking before we came in. What were you talking about?"

"Dear cousin," said M. de Vouillé, "the prefect was just giving us the official details concerning the *fiasco* at Marseilles."

"The *fiasco*?" exclaimed the duchesse.

"That's the word he used."

"And it's quite the appropriate word, too," said the official. "Can you comprehend a movement of this sort, the preparations for which are so slight and ill-concerted that the arrest of a mob-leader, by a sub-lieutenant of the 13th of the Line, was sufficient to upset the whole affair?"

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, Monsieur le Préfet!" said the duchesse sadly; "there is always, at every crisis, a

supreme moment when the destiny of princes and empires wavers like a leaf blown about by the wind! If at La Mure, for example, when Napoleon walked out to meet the soldiers sent against him, some sub-lieutenant had taken him by the collar, the return from Elba would also have been a mere *fiasco*."

Madame uttered these words in such penetrating tones that nobody spoke for a moment, and it was she who resumed the conversation.

"How about the Duchesse de Berry?" she asked. "Does any one know what became of her after this had happened?"

"She succeeded in reaching the 'Carlo-Alberto,' and went aboard of her again."

"Indeed!"

"It was the only sensible thing for her to do, as far as I can see," the prefect added.

"You are right, monsieur," said the old gentleman who accompanied Madame, speaking for the first time; "and if I had had the honor to be near her Highness, and she would have lent any weight to my words, I would have given her that advice in all sincerity."

"Nobody is speaking to you, Monsieur my husband," said the duchesse. "I am speaking to Monsieur le Préfet, and I ask him now if he is quite sure that her royal Highness has gone aboard the vessel again?"

"Madame," said the prefect, with one of those *administrative* gestures which admit of no argument, "the Government has official information to that effect."

"Ah, indeed!" said the duchesse. "If the Government has official news of it, of course there is nothing more to be said; but," she added, venturing upon even more slippery ground than any she had yet passed over, "I had heard a different story, do you know?"

"Madame!" said the old man, in a slightly reproachful tone.

"What have you heard, my cousin?" said M. de Vouillé, who also began to take the interest of a gambler in the situation.

"Yes; what have you heard?" echoed the prefect.

"Oh, you understand, of course, Monsieur le Préfet, that my news is not official!" said the duchesse. "I speak only of reports which very likely are absurd on their face."

"Madame de la Myre!" exclaimed the old man.

"Well, Monsieur de la Myre!" retorted the duchesse.

"Do you know, madame," suggested the prefect, "that Monsieur your husband seems to me to be very annoying! I will wager that it's he who doesn't want to allow you to return to Paris."

"Precisely! But still I hope to go in spite of him. 'What woman wills, God wills.'"

"Oh, these women! these women!" cried the public functionary.

"What about them?" asked the duchesse.

"Oh, nothing!" said the prefect. "I am waiting, madame, for you to tell us what these reports are of which you were speaking just now."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* they are of little consequence. I heard it said,—but take notice that I only tell it as a rumor,—I heard it said that the Duchesse de Berry had refused to listen to all her friends' arguments, and had obstinately declined to go aboard the 'Carlo-Alberto' again."

"Well, where is she now, pray?" asked the prefect.

"In France."

"In France! And what does she propose to do in France?"

"*Dame!* you are well aware, Monsieur le Préfet, that La Vendée was the objective point of her royal Highness's journey."

"Surely; but when she had miserably failed in the South —"

"She had all the more reason to try for success in the West."

The prefect smiled disdainfully.

"So you believe in Madame's re-embarkation, do you?" queried the duchesse.

"I can take my oath," said the prefect, "that at this moment she is in the territory of the King of Sardinia, from whom France is about to demand an explanation of his conduct."

"Poor King of Sardinia! He will offer a very simple explanation."

"What will it be?"

"I knew very well that Madame was mad, but I did n't know that she was enough so to do what she has done."

"Madame! madame!" said the old gentleman.

"Well, upon my word," cried the duchesse, "I do hope, Monsieur de la Myre, that, although you oppose my wishes, you will do me the favor to respect my opinions, — which I am sure, by the way, agree with M. le Préfet's. Is it not so, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"The fact is," replied the official, with a laugh, "that her royal Highness has acted throughout this affair as if there was a screw loose somewhere."

"There, you see!" said the duchesse. "What would you think, then, if the rumors should prove to be true, and Madame should make her way into La Vendée?"

"But by what route could she do so?" the prefect asked.

"*Dame!* through your neighbor's prefecture, or your own. They say that she was seen and recognized at Toulouse, just as she was changing horses at the door of the *bureau de poste*, in an open carriage."

"Oh, the idea!" exclaimed the prefect; "that would be too much!"

"So much so," interposed the comte, "that M. le Préfet does n't believe a word of it."

"Not one word!" said the functionary, dwelling emphatically upon each one of the three syllables.

At this moment the door was opened, and one of the comte's servants announced that a clerk from the prefecture wished to hand to his chief a despatch just arrived from Paris.

"May he come in?" the prefect asked M. de Vouillé.

"Most assuredly," was the reply.

The clerk came in and handed a sealed despatch to the prefect, who bowed courteously by way of apology to the other guests.

The silence was unbroken, and all eyes were fixed upon the official.

Madame exchanged glances with M. de Vouillé, who was laughing silently, with M. de Lussac, who was laughing aloud, and with her pretended husband, who maintained an imperturbably serious demeanor.

"Bless my soul!" suddenly exclaimed the prefect, while his features very indiscreetly expressed the utmost astonishment.

"What's the matter?" asked M. de Vouillé.

"The matter is," exclaimed the functionary, "that Madame de la Myre has been telling us the truth concerning her royal Highness! That her royal Highness has not left France; that her royal Highness is making the best of her way to La Vendée by way of Toulouse, Libourne, and Poitiers!"

As he spoke, the prefect rose.

"Where are you going, pray, Monsieur le Préfet?" the duchesse inquired.

"To do my duty, madame, painful though it may be; and to give orders for the arrest of her royal Highness, if, as my despatch from Paris indicates, she is imprudent enough to put foot in my department."

"Do so, Monsieur le Préfet, do so," said Madame. "I can only applaud your zeal, and promise to remember it when I have the opportunity."

She held out her hand to the prefect, who gallantly imprinted a kiss upon it, after he had, with a look, asked M. de la Myre's permission; which was accorded in the same way.

CHAPTER XIV.

PETIT-PIERRE.

LET us return to the cabin of Goodman Tinguay, which we left for a while to make a *détour* by the Château de Vouillé.

Forty-eight hours have passed, and again we find Bertha and Michel at the sick man's pillow.

Although Doctor Roger's regular visits rendered the maiden's presence in the infected dwelling altogether useless, Bertha, notwithstanding Mary's observations, had persisted in bestowing some of her time upon the Vendean.

It may be that Christian charity was not the only motive which attracted her to the farmer's cabin.

However it may have been, by a natural enough coincidence, Michel, casting his fear to the winds, had been beforehand with Mademoiselle de Souday, and was already installed in the cabin when she arrived.

Was it Bertha whom Michel had counted upon seeing? We should not dare to say. He may, however, have thought that Mary would take her turn in performing the duties of charity.

He may also have had a vague hope that she would not let the opportunity of being near him escape her; and his heart beat violently when he saw in the doorway of the poor hut a figure which, in the darkness, he could not quite distinguish, except that he knew from its graceful outlines it must belong to one of the daughters of the Marquis de Souday.

Michel was conscious of some slight disappointment when he recognized Bertha. But his very love filled his heart with affection for the marquis himself, with a sympathetic feeling for crabbed Jean Oullier, and with kindness for their dogs; and could he not love Mary's sister?

Would not his affection for Bertha draw him nearer to Mary? Would it not be blissful to him to hear the name of her who was absent?

Thus he overflowed with courteous attentions, and the young girl responded with a satisfaction which she did not take the trouble to hide.

Unfortunately for Michel, it was difficult to think of much else than the invalid.

Tinguy's condition grew worse from hour to hour. He had fallen into that torpid, unconscious state which doctors call *coma*, and which, in inflammatory troubles, characterizes the period immediately preceding dissolution.

He no longer saw what was going on about him; he no longer replied when he was spoken to. His eyes, tremendously dilated, were fixed on vacancy; he was almost motionless, save that now and then his hands tried to pull the bed-clothing over his face, or to draw toward him imaginary objects which he thought he could see beside his bed.

Bertha, who, young as she was, had more than once been present at similar sad scenes, could no longer delude herself as to the poor peasant's real condition. She wished to spare Rosine the torture of witnessing her father's death-agony, — which she momentarily expected, — and she told her to go for Doctor Roger.

"But I can go, mademoiselle, if you wish," said Michel. "I have stronger legs than this poor child;

and besides, it is not very wise to send her such a distance at night."

"No, Monsieur Michel, Rosine runs no risk of harm, and I have my reasons for wishing to keep you here. Is it very repugnant to you?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, you don't think it! But I am so happy to be of the least use to you that I try not to miss any opportunity."

"Never fear; it is likely that for some little time hence I shall have occasion more than once to put your devotion to the test."

Rosine had been gone a short ten minutes when the patient suddenly seemed to experience a very perceptible and very extraordinary change for the better. His eyes lost their vacant stare; his respiration was much easier. His stiffened fingers relaxed, and he passed them several times across his forehead to wipe away the perspiration in which it was bathed.

"How do you feel, Père Tinguy?" the young girl asked him.

"Better," he replied in a feeble voice. "The good God did not will that I should desert before the battle," he added, trying to smile.

"Perhaps, since it is for him that you are going to fight."

The peasant shook his head sadly, and sighed heavily at the same time.

"Monsieur Michel," said Bertha, beckoning the young man to a corner of the room, so that the sick man could not hear her voice, "run to the curé, and tell him to come at once; and do you arouse the neighbors too."

"Why, is n't he better, mademoiselle? He just told you that he was."

"Child that you are! Did you never see a lamp go out? Its last flicker is always the brightest, and it is the same with our miserable bodies. Run quickly! There will be no death-agony; the fever has used up the poor fellow's strength, and his soul will fly away without a struggle or effort or pain."

"Are you going to remain alone with him?"

"Go quickly, and don't worry about me."

Michel went out, and Bertha returned to Tinguy, who held his hand out to her.

"Thanks, my brave girl," said he.

"Thanks for what, Père Tinguy?"

"Thanks for your trouble, first of all, and next for your thoughtfulness in sending for the curé."

"Did you hear?"

Tinguy smiled outright.

"Yes," he replied; "although you spoke very low."

"But the priest's presence need not make you think that you are going to die, my good Tinguy; don't begin to be afraid."

"Afraid!" cried the peasant, striving to sit up in bed. "Afraid! and why? I have respected my elders, and cherished the little ones; I have suffered without complaining. I have worked hard without a murmur, praising God when the frost devastated my little field, blessing his name when the harvest was poor. I have never turned away the beggar whom Saint Anne sent to my humble fireside; I have followed the commandments of God and the Church, when our priests said, 'Up and take your guns!' I fought against the foes of my faith and my king, and remained humble in victory and constant in defeat. I was always ready to give my life for that sacred cause, — and should I be afraid? Oh, no, mademoiselle! The day of our death is the day

of days for us poor Christians. Ignorant as I am, I know that. It is the day that makes us the equals of the great and happy of the earth. If that day has come for me, if God calls me to him, I am ready; and I shall appear before his judgment-seat, full of hope in his mercy."

Tinguy's face fairly shone while he pronounced these words; but the burst of religious enthusiasm put the finishing touch to his strength.

He fell heavily back upon his bed, and stammered a few unintelligible words, among which could be distinguished "Blues" and "parish," mingled with the names of God and the Virgin.

The curé entered at this moment. Bertha pointed to the sick man, and the priest realizing at once what was expected of him, began the prayers for the dying.

Michel begged Bertha to withdraw; she consented, and they left the cabin together after offering a last prayer at Tinguy's bedside.

The neighbors began to arrive by twos and threes; each one knelt and repeated after the priest the litany for the dead.

Two little candles of yellow wax, placed one on either side of a copper crucifix, shed a feeble light upon the dismal scene.

Suddenly, just as the priest and those present were mentally reciting the Ave Maria, the cry of a screech-owl, at a short distance from the hut, drowned their monotonous mumbling.

All the peasants started; but the dying man, whose eyes had been closed for some moments, and whose breathing was nought but an almost inaudible hiss, quickly raised his head.

"Here I am!" he cried; "here I am! I am the guide!"

Then he tried to imitate the howl of the brown owl, as a reply to the cry he had heard.

He could not accomplish it; his dying breath sounded like a sort of sob, his head fell back and his eyes opened to their fullest extent. He was dead.

Thereupon a stranger appeared upon the threshold.

He was a young Breton peasant, clad in a red doublet with silvered buttons, a blue waistcoat trimmed with red, a broad-brimmed hat, and long leather gaiters; in his hand was an iron-shod walking-stick, such as peasants use when travelling.

He seemed surprised at the sight which met his gaze; however he asked no questions, but fell upon his knees in prayer. Then he approached the bed and looked earnestly at poor Tinguy's pale, distorted face; two great tears rolled down his cheeks; he wiped them away and went out as silently as he had entered.

The peasants, accustomed to the religious practice which required that no one should pass the house of death without a prayer for the soul of the deceased and a blessing for his dust, were not surprised at the stranger's presence, and took no heed of his departure.

A few steps from the hut, another peasant, younger and smaller than he, and who seemed to be his brother, was awaiting him, mounted on a horse which was saddled in the custom of the country.

"Well, Rameau d'Or," said the little fellow, "what's the difficulty?"

"The difficulty is, that there is no room for us in the house; a guest is there before us, who occupies the whole house."

"Who is it?"

"Death."

"Who is dead?"

"The very man at whose hands we were to seek shelter. I would say to you: 'Let us take advantage of his death; let us hide under a corner of the shroud, which no one will lift,' but I heard it said that Tinguy died of typhoid fever; and although the doctors deny that it is contagious, I will not expose you to such risk."

"You don't fear that you were seen and recognized?"

"Impossible. There were eight or ten people, men and women, praying about the bed; I went in, and knelt and prayed like the others. That is what every Breton or Vendean peasant does at such times."

"And now what are we to do?" the younger peasant asked.

"I have told you; we had to decide between the château of my old comrade and the cabin of the poor peasant who was to be our guide,—between the comforts of a princely abode with reasonable security, and the small hut, the wretched bed, and buckwheat bread, with absolute security. The good God has solved the question; we no longer have any choice in the matter, and must be content with the comfortable shelter."

"But you say the château is not surely safe?"

"The château belongs to one of the friends of my boyhood whose father was made a baron by the Restoration; the father is dead, the château is occupied at present by the widow and her son. If the son were alone, I should have no fear, for although weak, he is a good, honest fellow; but I imagine that his mother is selfish and ambitious, so that I am a little uneasy."

"Pshaw! for one night! You are not venturesome, Rameau d'Or."

"Indeed, I am on my own account; but I am responsible to France, or at least to my party, for the life of Mad —"

"Of Petit-Pierre, you mean. Ah, Rameau d'Or, we have been travelling two hours, and that's the tenth bet you have lost to me."

"It shall be the last, Mad — Petit-Pierre, I mean; henceforth I know you by no other name than that, and I see in you only my brother."

"Come on, come on to the château! I am so weary that I would ask shelter from an ogress."

"We can take a cross-road, which will lead us there in ten minutes," said the elder of the two. "Arrange yourself in the saddle as comfortably as you can; I will go on foot, and you need only follow me; otherwise we might lose our way, as the road is only slightly marked."

"Wait," said Petit-Pierre, alighting from his horse as he spoke.

"Where are you going?" Rameau d'Or inquired with some anxiety.

"You said your prayer by the bedside of this humble peasant, and I must say mine."

"Do you really mean it?"

"He was a brave and noble heart," Petit-Pierre urged, "and would have risked his life for us. I certainly owe him one poor prayer."

Rameau d'Or removed his hat and stood aside to let his young companion pass.

As Rameau d'Or had done, the little peasant entered the cabin, took the branch of box-wood, dipped it in the blessed water, and shook it over the body; then he knelt and repeated his prayer at the foot of the bed, and went out without attracting any more attention than his companion.

Petit-Pierre rejoined Rameau d'Or, who assisted him to remount his horse, and both followed in silence, one

in the saddle, and the other on foot, the almost invisible path which led to the Château de la Logerie by a more direct and shorter route, as we have said.

They had advanced scarcely five hundred feet when Rameau d'Or came to a halt and stopped Petit-Pierre's horse.

"What is it now?" the latter asked.

"I hear footsteps," said the young man. "Draw aside against these bushes, and I will stand behind this tree. Whoever is coming will probably pass without seeing us."

The manoeuvre was executed with lightning-like rapidity. It was well for the travellers that they made such haste, for the person in question was approaching so fast that he loomed up in the darkness just as they had both taken their positions, — Petit-Pierre against the hedge, and Rameau d'Or behind his tree.

The unknown for whom they made way was soon less than twenty feet away from Rameau d'Or, whose eyes, already accustomed to the darkness, distinguished a young man of some twenty years, running rather than walking in the same direction as themselves.

He had his hat in his hand, and the task of recognition was made easier by the fact that his hair was blown back by the wind, and left his face entirely exposed to view.

Rameau d'Or uttered an exclamation of surprise; but as if he still had some doubt, and wavered in his desire to speak, he let the young man pass him a few steps, and it was not until his back was completely turned to him that he called, —

"Michel!"

The young man, who hardly expected to hear his own name uttered in that deserted spot at that hour, leaped

to one side, and asked in a voice, trembling with excitement, —

“Who calls me?”

“I,” said Rameau d’Or, removing his hat, and a wig which he dropped at the foot of the tree, and advancing toward his friend without other disguise than the balance of his Breton costume, which had no effect upon his face.

“Henri de Bonneville!” cried the baron, astounded beyond measure.

“Myself. But don’t say my name so loud; we are in a region and at a time when the bushes and ditches and trees share with the walls the privilege of having ears.”

“Indeed, yes,” said Michel, in some alarm; “and then —”

“Yes — and then?” echoed M. de Bonneville.

“Why, perhaps you are here in connection with the uprising they are talking about?”

“Precisely so! And now tell me, in two words, what are you?”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“My friend,” replied the young baron, “I have no very well-formed opinion yet; however, I will confess to you very low —”

“As low as you please, but hurry up and confess!”

“Well, I will confess that I incline to Henri V.”

“Very good, my dear Michel,” said the Comte de Bonneville gayly; “if you incline to Henri V. that’s all that I need to know.”

“But allow me — You see I am not wholly decided yet.”

“So much the better! I shall have the pleasure of

completing your conversion, and in order that I may undertake it with the best chance of success, you must at once offer me, and one of my friends who is with me, a night's lodging at your château."

"Where is your friend?"

"Here he is," said Petit-Pierre, riding forward, and saluting the young man with a graceful, easy courtesy, which contrasted strangely with the costume he wore.

Michel looked at the little peasant for some seconds, and said in an undertone to Rameau d'Or,— to the Comte de Bonneville, rather,—

"Henri, what is your friend's name?"

"Michel, you are false to all the traditions of old-time hospitality; you have forgotten your Odyssey, my dear fellow, I am pained to see. What matters my friend's name? Is n't it sufficient for you to know that he is a man of unexceptionable family?"

"Are you quite sure that he's a man?"

The comte and Petit-Pierre shouted with laughter.

"You are evidently determined to know who your guests are, my poor Michel."

"Not for myself, my good Henri, not for myself, I swear to you; but the fact is that at the Château de la Logerie —"

"Well, at the Château de la Logerie?"

"I am not the master."

"Yes, I know that the Baronne Michel is the mistress; I have told my friend Petit-Pierre as much, but we don't propose to make a visit, but to pass just one night. You can take us to your apartments; I will pay a visit to the cellar and the pantry, — still in the old place, I suppose; my young companion will take your bed, where he can have a comfortable night's sleep; then at daybreak to-morrow I will go in search of a

lodging, and when I have found it, which will not be difficult, I trust, we will rid you of our presence."

"It's not to be thought of, Henri! Don't for a moment think that it's for myself that I fear; but your safety would be endangered the moment you entered the château."

"How so?"

"My mother is still up, I am sure; she is awaiting my return; she will see us come in. We could put her off the scent as to your disguise, I fancy; but how could we explain that of your companion? — for I can see that he is disguised."

"He is right," said Petit-Pierre.

"But what shall we do, then?"

"And it is n't a question of my mother alone," Michel continued.

"Who else is there?"

"Wait a moment!" said the young man, looking uneasily about, "let us get a little farther away from the hedge and these bushes."

"The devil!"

"I'm thinking of Courtin."

"Of Courtin? Who's Courtin?"

"Don't you remember Courtin, the farmer?"

"Oh, to be sure! a good devil, who was always of your opinion against everybody else, and even against your mother."

"That's the man! Well, Courtin is mayor of the village,—a rank Philippist! If he should see you travelling around at night in this costume, he would have you arrested without ceremony."

"That deserves reflection," said Henri in a more serious tone. "What thinks Petit-Pierre?"

"I don't think at all, my dear Rameau d'Or; I leave you to do the thinking for me."

"So the result of all this is that you close your door upon us?" said Bonneville.

"What does it matter to you," said the baron, whose eyes began to glow with the fire of hope,— "what does it matter to you, so long as I open to you another door than that of the Château de la Logerie?"

"What does it matter to us? I should say that it matters a vast deal to us! What says my young companion?"

"I say that, provided some door opens to us, it's all that I want. I am ready to fall with weariness, I must confess."

"Then follow me," said the baron.

"One moment: is it very far?"

"About an hour: a short league and a quarter."

"Does Petit-Pierre feel the strength to undertake it?" asked Henri.

"Petit-Pierre will find it," laughed the little peasant; "so let us follow Baron Michel."

"We follow Baron Michel," echoed Bonneville. "Lead on, baron!"

The little party which had been motionless for ten minutes, moved forward again under the baron's guidance. But Michel had not taken fifty steps when his friend put his hand on his shoulder.

"Where are you taking us?" he said.

"Never mind."

"I will follow you on condition that you promise a good supper and a good bed for Petit-Pierre, who is somewhat delicate, as you see."

"He shall have everything that I should like to offer him myself; the best dish from the pantry, the best wine from the cellar, and the best bed in the château."

With that they resumed their journey.

"I will run on ahead, so that you will not have to wait," Michel exclaimed suddenly.

"One instant," said Henri, "whither are you running?"

"To the Château de Souday."

"The Château de Souday?"

"Yes, you know it perfectly well,—the château with the pointed towers covered with moss, on the left hand, just opposite the forest of Machecoul."

"The château of the Wolves?"

"Yes, if you choose to call them so."

"And that's where you are taking us?"

"That's the very place."

"Have you weighed well what you are doing, Michel?"

"I will answer for everything."

Confident that his friend knew the way, the young man darted off in the direction of the Château de Souday with the swiftness of foot of which he had given such abundant proof the night that he went to Palluau for the doctor for poor Tinguy.

"Well," asked Petit-Pierre, "what had we best do?"

"Why, as we have no choice in the matter, we must follow him."

"To the château of the Wolves?"

"To the château of the Wolves."

"So be it; but in order to make the road seem shorter, my dear Rameau d'Or," said the young peasant, "you must tell me what the Wolves are."

"I will tell you all I know about them, at all events."

"That's all that I can ask."

With his hand resting on the saddle-bow, the Comte de Bonneville told Petit-Pierre the species of fable which was current in the department of Loire-Inférieure and the adjoining departments, concerning the two un-

tamed heiresses of the Marquis de Souday, their hunts by day, their nocturnal wanderings, and the noisy, yelping packs of hounds with which they drove the wolves and boars for many and many a mile.

The comte was in the middle of the most dramatic part of the legend when suddenly he espied the towers of the château, and stopping short in his narration, he informed his companion that they had reached the end of their journey.

Petit-Pierre, fully persuaded that he was going to see something resembling the witches of Macbeth, summoned all his courage as he approached the terrible château, when suddenly, at a turning in the road, he found himself before the open door, in which two graceful forms were standing, apparently awaiting their arrival, lighted by a torch held behind them by a man with stern features in rustic dress.

Petit-Pierre looked fearfully at Bertha and at Mary; for it was they who had come to welcome the travellers, having been warned of their approach by Michel.

He saw two bewitching young girls,—one fair, with blue eyes and angelic features; the other with jet-black eyes and hair, a proud and determined expression, and a face which spoke loyalty in every feature; and both were smiling.

Rameau d'Or's youthful companion alighted from his horse, and they approached the young ladies together.

"My friend M. le Baron Michel has led me to hope, mesdemoiselles, that M. le Marquis de Souday, your father, would give us shelter," said the Comte de Bonneville to Bertha and Mary.

"My father is absent, monsieur," Bertha replied; "he will regret having lost this opportunity to exercise a virtue which we are able to use but seldom."

"But I don't know whether Michel told you, mademoiselle, that your hospitality might involve some risk to yourselves. My young companion and myself are proscribed, to all intent; persecution may be the penalty you will have to pay for taking us in."

"You come in the name of the cause which is ours, monsieur. As strangers merely, we would have taken you in; as Royalists and proscribed, you are doubly welcome, even though death and ruin should enter our poor abode with you. If my father were here, he would speak as I do to you."

"M. le Baron Michel has undoubtedly told you my name; it remains for me to tell you my companion's."

"We do not ask it, monsieur; your claims upon our hospitality are entirely irrespective of your name, whatever it may be. You are Royalists, and proscribed for a cause in defence of which we, though but women, would gladly give our blood! Enter our house; if it is not rich or luxurious, you will at least find it faithful and discreet."

With a superbly majestic gesture Bertha waved her hand toward the door, by way of invitation to her young guests to cross the threshold.

"May Saint Julien be blessed!" said Petit-Pierre in Bonneville's ear; "here we have the château and the cabin, between which you told me I must choose, united under one roof. These Wolves of yours please me extremely!"

He passed through the door, with a graceful inclination of the head to the two girls.

The Comte de Bonneville followed him.

Mary and Bertha made a friendly farewell sign to Michel, and the latter extended her hand; but Jean Oullier slammed the door so savagely that the poor boy had no time to grasp the hand.

He gazed for a few moments at the towers of the château, which showed black against the sky, and the windows which were lighted up one after another; then he hurried away.

When he had disappeared, the bushes opened to give passage to an individual who had been present at this scene, actuated by widely different motives from those of the actors in it.

It was Courtin, who, after assuring himself that there was no one in the neighborhood, took the road which his young master had taken to return to La Logerie.

CHAPTER XV.

AT AN UNSEASONABLE HOUR.

It was very nearly two o'clock in the morning when young Baron Michel found himself at the end of the avenue leading to the Château de la Logerie.

The air was perfectly calm; the awe-inspiring stillness of the night, disturbed only by the gentle rustling of the aspens, was favorable to the profound revery in which he was plunged.

It goes without saying that the two sisters were the objects of his thoughts, and that the one of the two whose image the baron followed with as much loving respect as that with which Tobias followed the angel, as we are informed by Holy Writ, was Mary.

But when he espied, some five hundred feet away, at the far end of the dark line of trees, beneath whose leafy canopy he was walking, the windows of the château glistening in the moon-rays, the seductive dreams he had been dreaming vanished, and his thoughts at once assumed a more prosaic complexion.

Instead of the lovely features of the young ladies, who had thus far been walking at his side, his imagination sketched the stern and menacing aspect of his mother.

We know what profound awe the Baronne Michel inspired in her son.

If he had known of a single house, or an inn, in the neighborhood, though it were a league away, where he could find a lodging, his apprehension was so aroused

that he would have postponed his return to the château till morning. It was the first time, not that he had slept away from home, but that he had returned at such an unseasonable hour; and he had an instinctive feeling that his absence was known, and that his mother was sitting up for him.

What answer was he to make to that terrible question, "Where have you been?"

Courtin alone could give him shelter; but if he applied to him, he must tell him everything, and the young baron realized how dangerous it would be to take for a confidant a man like Courtin.

So he decided to brave the maternal thunderbolts; but for much the same reason that the condemned man decides to brave the scaffold, — because he cannot help himself, — and pursued his way.

But the nearer he came to the château, the more his resolution wavered.

When he reached the other end of the avenue, and found it necessary to walk across the greensward in full view; when he saw his mother's window standing out from the dark facade, the only one in which there was a light, — his heart altogether failed him.

His forebodings were realized: the baronne was lying in wait for his return.

The young man's resolution, as we have said, speedily faded away out of sight; and terror, developing the powers of his imagination, suggested to him a ruse which might at least postpone the explosion of his mother's wrath, if it did not altogether dispel it.

He turned to the left, and crept along in the shade of a hedge, until he reached the wall of the kitchen-garden, which he scaled, and then passed through the gate leading from the kitchen-garden into the park.

Once in the park, it was an easy task for him to reach the windows of the château with the aid of the clumps of trees.

Thus far the scheme had worked to perfection, but the most difficult or most uncertain part remained to be accomplished. It was essential for him to find a window which some negligent servant had left unfastened, and by means of which he could get into the house, and to his apartment unobserved.

The Château de la Logerie consisted of a large square main-building flanked by four towers of similar shape.

The kitchen and offices were in the basement, the reception rooms on the ground floor, the baronne's apartments on the first floor, and her son's on the second.

Michel examined the château carefully on three sides, trying all the doors gently, but firmly, keeping close to the wall, walking on tiptoe, and holding his breath.

But not a door nor a window yielded to his touch.

There remained the main front of the building to be explored, and that was the portion where the greatest danger lay. The baronne's windows were, as we have said, on that side, and there was no shrubbery close to the walls, as was the case on the other sides. One of the windows — that appertaining to her bedroom — was open.

However, Michel thought that if the scolding must come it made little difference whether he received it outside the house or within, and so he made up his mind to take the risk.

He was just on the point of putting his head around the corner of the tower, when he saw a shadow gliding along the lawn.

The shadow naturally led him to suspect the presence of the body by which it was cast; so he stopped his own

forward movement, and directed all his attention upon the new arrival.

He saw that it was a man, and that he was following the road which he ought to have followed himself, if he had intended to return directly to the château.

The young baron drew back a few steps, and buried himself in the shadow of the tower.

Meanwhile the man was drawing near.

When he was within fifty feet of the château, Michel heard his mother's sharp voice at the window.

"Is it you, Michel, at last?" she asked.

"No, madame, no," replied a voice which the young man recognized with astonishment mingled with dread as that of the farmer, his tenant; "you do too much honor to poor Courtin by mistaking him for M. le Baron."

"Great God!" cried the baronne, "what brings you here at this time of night?"

"Ah, you suspect that it's something of importance, don't you, madame?"

"Has anything happened to my son?"

The unmistakable anguish with which his mother pronounced the words touched the young man so deeply that he was about to leave his hiding-place to reassure her, but Courtin's reply, following quickly upon the question, nipped his impulse in the bud, and he remained in the shadow.

"Oh, no, no, madame!" the farmer replied; "the lad, if I may venture to speak so of M. le Baron, is as safe as your eye, — thus far, at least."

"Thus far!" interposed the baronne. "Is he on the point of running into danger, then?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Courtin; "some harm may come to him if he continues to allow himself to be enticed by such creatures as those imps of Satan, for

whom hell is the only suitable place! And it is for the express purpose of preventing such a disaster that I have taken the liberty to come here in the middle of the night; for I had an idea that you would know M. le Baron was not at home, and that you would not have retired."

"You did well, Courtin. But tell me where the wretched boy is; do you know?"

Courtin looked around.

"Faith, I am much surprised," he said, "that he has n't yet come in. I took the parish road on purpose to leave the path through the woods clear for him, and the one is a good quarter of a league shorter than the other."

"But once more I ask you where he is coming from, where has he been, what has he been doing, why he is travelling around at two o'clock in the morning without thinking of my anxiety, or that he is endangering my health as well as his own?"

"Madame la Baronne," suggested Courtin, "don't you think yourself that that's a good many questions for me to answer, standing here in the night air?"

He added in a lower voice:—

"What I have to tell Madame la Baronne is of so serious a nature that she will be none too safe for hearing it in her own apartment. Furthermore, if the young master is not at the château, he must very soon be here," he said, with another uneasy glance around; "and I am not in the least anxious that he should know that I am watching, although I do it for his good and to be of service to you."

"Come in, then," cried the baronne; "you are right. Come in at once!"

"Excuse me, madame; but how shall I come, please?"

"That's a fact," said the baronne; "the door is locked."

"If madame would throw down the key —"

"It's in the lock on the inside."

"Ah, *dame!* —"

"I sent all my people to bed because I did not want them to know how my son is acting; but wait a moment, I will ring for my maid."

"What! Pray, madame, don't do anything of the kind!" said Courtin; "it is useless to let any one into our secrets. And it's my opinion that the crisis is too grave for madame to worry about etiquette. Of course, I know that it's not madame's place to come down and open the door for a poor farmer like me; but once doesn't make a custom. If every one in the château is asleep, so much the better. We shall be out of reach of inquisitive ears, at all events."

"Upon my word, you terrify me, Courtin," said the baronne, who had really been restrained hitherto by an absurd feeling of pride, which the farmer had quickly detected. "I hesitate no longer."

She left the window, and a moment later Michel heard the key turning in the lock in the hall-door. His first emotion was a sort of agony, to think that he was losing so excellent an opportunity of getting into the house; but it soon occurred to him that his mother and Courtin, in their absorption, would be very likely to forget to close the door.

The young man waited a few seconds, to give them time to reach the upper stories. Then he glided along close to the wall, ascended the steps, pushed the door, which swung noiselessly upon its hinges, and found himself in the hall.

His first plan had been to go at once to his bedroom and await developments there, pretending to be asleep. If he did that, as nobody could swear to the hour of his return, he had still a chance to extricate himself from the scrape by a bold lie.

But matters had assumed a different phase since he had formed that plan.

Courtin had followed and watched him, and Courtin undoubtedly knew the hiding-place of the Comte de Bonneville and his companion. He forgot himself for a moment and thought only of his friend, whose safety the farmer, holding the opinions which Michel knew him to hold, might seriously endanger.

Instead of going up to the second floor, the young man stopped at the first. Instead of going to his own room, he glided with catlike step along the corridor, stopped at his mother's door, and listened.

"And so you think, Courtin," the baronne was saying, "so you really think that my son has allowed himself to be lured by one of those wretched creatures?"

"Ah, yes, madame! So far as that goes, I am sure of it. And he has fallen into the toils so effectually that you will have great difficulty, I'm afraid, in disentangling him."

"Girls without a soul!"

"*Dame!* they come from some of the oldest stock in the country, Madame la Baronne, and that always seems to count for something with you nobles."

"Bah!" ejaculated the baronne. "Bastards!"

"True; but one of them's as pretty as an angel, and the other as handsome as a demon!"

"It is quite possible that Michel may have chosen to amuse himself with them for a while, as so many others in the neighborhood are said to have done; but it

cannot be that he has ever dreamed of marrying one of them, and he knows me too well to suppose that I would ever consent to such a match."

"With all due respect to M. Michel, Madame la Baronne, it's my opinion that he has not yet thought that all out, and perhaps does not even realize the extent of his feeling for the wenches; but I'm sure of one thing, and that is, that in another and much more serious direction, he is in a fair way to get himself into trouble."

"What do you mean, Courtin?"

"*Dame!*" said the farmer, "do you know, Madame la Baronne, that it would be very hard for me, with my affection and respect for you, to order my young master's arrest?"

Michel started in the corridor, but his emotion was much less violent than the baronne's.

"Arrest Michel!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her full height. "You seem to forget yourself, Master Courtin."

"No, Madame la Baronne, I do not forget myself."

"But —"

"I am your tenant, it is true," rejoined Courtin, making a motion with his hand, which was intended to calm the proud lady's excitement. "I am bound to render you an accurate statement of the crops of which you are entitled to half, and to meet my obligations to you at the appointed day and hour; all of which I do as well as I can, notwithstanding the hard times. But, before everything, I am a citizen; and more than that, mayor. And in those capacities, likewise, I have duties to fulfil, Madame la Baronne, however it may tear my poor heart to do it."

"What rubbish is that you're talking, Master Courtin,

and what connection can there possibly be between my son and your duties as citizen or as mayor?"

"The connection is just this, Madame la Baronne; that Monsieur your son has intimate relations with the enemies of the State."

"I am well aware," said the baronne, "that M. le Marquis de Souday affects very exaggerated views. But the amorettes of Michel with one or the other of his daughters could hardly constitute a crime on that account, I should say."

"These amorettes will lead M. Michel much farther than you imagine, Madame la Baronne; take my word for it. I know that as yet he is only moistening his beak in the troubled waters which surround him; but that is enough to obscure his sight."

"Come, a fig for your metaphors; explain yourself, Courtin."

"Very well, Madame la Baronne; here's the explanation in full. This evening, after being present at the death-bed of that old Chouan Tinguy, and running the risk of bringing malignant fever to the château, after having escorted the taller of the She-wolves home, M. le Baron acted as guide to two peasants,—who were no more peasants than I am a gentleman; and he guided them to the Château de Souday."

"Who told you that, Courtin?"

"My two eyes, Madame la Baronne; they are reliable, and I believe them."

"In your opinion, who were these two peasants?"

"The two peasants?"

"Yes."

"Well, one of them was the Comte de Bonneville, or I'll put my hand in the fire,—a thorough Chouan, he! It's of no use to say it was n't he; for he lived in the

neighborhood a long while, and I recognized him. As for the other — ”

“ Well, go on.”

“ As for the other, unless I am much mistaken, he was something better.”

“ Who, pray? Come, name him, Courtin.”

“ Never mind, Madame la Baronne. If necessary, and it probably will be, I will name him to the person who has the right to know his name.”

“ What! Do you propose to denounce my son, I should like to know?” cried the baronne, astounded at the assured tone of her tenant, who was in general so humble in his demeanor toward her.

“ Most certainly, Madame la Baronne,” answered Courtin, coolly.

“ Why, you can’t think of doing such a thing, Courtin!”

“ I am so determined to do it, Madame la Baronne, that I should be already on my way to Montaigu or Nantes, if I had not decided to warn you first, so that you might have time to put M. Michel in a safe place.”

“ But even if Michel should prove not to be involved in the affair,” said the baronne, earnestly, “ you are going to put me in a bad light with my neighbors, and — who can tell? — perhaps bring down terrible reprisals upon La Logerie.”

“ Very good; then we will protect La Logerie, Madame la Baronne.”

“ Courtin — ”

“ I saw the great war, Madame la Baronne. I was a little shaver, but I remember it well; and, faith! I am not anxious to see the like of it again. I have no desire to see my twenty arpents used as a battle-field, my crops eaten by one side and burned by the other. And I am

still less anxious to see violent hands laid upon the national property, which will be sure to happen if the Whites come out on top. Of my twenty arpents, five originally belonged to *émigrés*. But I have bought and paid for them; that's a quarter of my property. Lastly, yes, lastly, the Government relies upon me, and I desire to justify the confidence of the Government."

"But, Courtin," said the baronne, almost ready to descend to entreaty, "matters are not so serious as you fancy, I am sure."

"*Pardieu!* yes, they are, Madame la Baronne; very serious indeed. I am only a peasant, but that doesn't prevent my knowing what's going on as well as another; for I am a patient listener, and my eye is keen. The Retz country is in a ferment; one shot, and the soup will boil over the edge of the kettle."

"Courtin, you are mistaken."

"No, indeed, Madame la Baronne; no, indeed. I know what I know. *Mon Dieu!* the nobles have already had three meetings,—one at the Marquis de Souday's, one with him whom they call Louis Renaud, and once at the Comte de Saint-Amand's. All these meetings smell of powder, Madame la Baronne; and, speaking of powder, there are two kegs, and divers sacks of bullets at the house of the curé of Montbert. Last of all,—and most serious of all,—last of all, if I must tell you, the Duchesse de Berry is expected in the province; and it's my opinion, after what I have just seen, that it's very likely that she won't keep them waiting long."

"Why so?"

"Because I think she's here already!"

"Where, in God's name?"

"At the Château de Souday, to be sure."

"At the Château de Souday?"

"Yes, whither M. Michel guided her to-night."

"Michel? Oh, the wretched child! But you will keep silent, won't you, Courtin? I wish it; I command it. Besides, the Government has taken its measures; and if the duchesse should undertake to come to La Vendée, she would be arrested before she could get here."

"Very good; but suppose she is here, for all that, Madame la Baronne?"

"So much the more reason for you to hold your tongue."

"Indeed! and let the glory and profit of such a capture escape me, — to say nothing of the fact that from now on until somebody else captures her, if I don't do it myself, the land will be given over to fire and sword. No, Madame la Baronne; no, that cannot be."

"But what shall I do? Great God! what shall I do?"

"Listen, Madame la Baronne," said Courtin; "this is what you must do."

"Tell me, Courtin; tell me!"

"As I desire to remain your faithful, zealous servant, while doing my whole duty as a good citizen; as I hope that, in gratitude for what I do for you, you will let me have my farm again on terms which I can accept, — I will not mention the name of M. Michel. But you must try to prevent his tumbling into such a hole in future. He's in it now, to be sure; but there is still time to get him out."

"Never fear, Courtin."

"But look you, Madame la Baronne," said the farmer.

"Well, what is it?"

"*Dame!* I hardly dare to offer advice to Madame la Baronne; it's not my place."

"Say on, Courtin; say on."

"Well, then, to extricate M. Michel from this mess altogether, it will be necessary, in my judgment, for you to persuade him by some means or other — entreaties or threats — to leave La Logerie for Paris."

"Yes, Courtin, yes; you're quite right."

"But I imagine that he will not like to do it."

"When I have made up my mind, Courtin, he will have to like it."

"He will be twenty-one in eleven months; he is very nearly of age."

"But I tell you that he will go, Courtin. Why, what's the matter?"

Courtin was listening intently, with his eyes fixed on the door.

"I thought I heard steps in the corridor," said he.

"Go and look."

Courtin took the light and ran out into the corridor.

"There's nobody there," he said, returning. "And yet I was almost sure that I heard steps."

"Where do you suppose the wretched boy can be at this time of night?"

"*Dame!*" said Courtin; "waiting for me at my house, perhaps. The young baron trusts me, and it would n't be the first time he has come to tell me his little troubles."

"You are right, Courtin; it's possible that he's there. Hurry home, and be sure you don't forget your promise."

"Nor you yours, Madame la Baronne. If he comes home, get him out of the way. Don't let him communicate with the Wolves; for if he sees them again —"

"Well, what then?"

"Why, in that case, I should n't be surprised any day to hear of his picking off soldiers in the furze."

“Oh, it would kill me with grief! What a fatal idea it was of my husband’s ever to return to this accursed country!”

“Fatal, indeed, Madame la Baronne, — especially for himself!”

The baronne hung her head sadly under the memories evoked by his words; and he withdrew, after investigating his surroundings and making sure that there was nobody to observe his exit from the Château de la Logerie.

CHAPTER XVI.

COURTIN'S DIPLOMACY.

COURTIN had made but little progress on the road which led to his farm when he heard a rustling in the bushes at his side.

"Who goes there?" he asked, springing across the road and assuming a defensive attitude with the stick he was carrying.

"A friend," replied a youthful voice; and he to whom the voice belonged emerged from the hedge.

"Why, it's Monsieur le Baron!" cried the farmer.

"Himself, Courtin."

"Where in Heaven's name are you going at this hour? Great God, man! if Madame la Baronne knew that you were wandering around in the fields in the middle of the night, what would she say?" exclaimed the farmer, affecting surprise.

"It's this way, Courtin —"

"*Dame!*" said the peasant slyly; "it's to be presumed that M. le Baron has his reasons."

"Yes; and you shall know what they are," said Michel, "as soon as we get to your house."

"My house! you are coming to my house!" cried Courtin, really astonished.

"Do you decline to receive me?" the young man asked.

"Just God! I refuse to receive you in a house which, after all, is yours!"

"Let us lose no time, then, as it is very late. Go you ahead; I will follow you."

Courtin, disturbed by his young master's imperative tone, obeyed. After a few hundred feet, he climbed a fence, crossed a field, and was at the door of his farmhouse.

They entered the room on the ground floor, which served as living-room and kitchen, where Courtin raked together a few scattered embers upon the hearth, blew upon one which was still alive, and lighted a candle of yellow wax, which he set upon the chimney-piece.

This done, he was enabled to see by the light of the candle something which the moon's rays had not disclosed,—that Michel was as pale as death.

"Why, Monsieur le Baron!" exclaimed Courtin. "*Jésus-Dieu!* what is the matter?"

"Courtin," said the young man, frowning darkly, "I overheard your conversation with my mother."

"Indeed; you were listening, were you?" said the farmer, somewhat taken aback.

But he soon recovered his presence of mind.

"What of it?" he asked.

"You are very anxious for a renewal of your lease next year."

"I, Monsieur le Baron?"

"Yes, Courtin; much more anxious than you pretend to be."

"*Dame!* I should not be sorry to renew it, Monsieur le Baron; and yet, if I can't, I shall not die of it."

"Courtin, it will be for me to renew your lease," said the young man; "for I shall be of age when the time comes to sign it."

"Yes, it's as you say, Monsieur le Baron."

"But you understand," pursued the young man, to whom his desire to save the Comte de Bonneville, and to remain near Mary, imparted a degree of resolution quite foreign to his character, "you understand, do you not, that if you do what you were talking about just now, — denounce my friends, that is, — I will not be the man to renew the lease of a miserable spy and informer."

"Oh, ho!" said Courtin.

"That's what I mean. Once off the farm, Courtin, you say good-by to it forever; for you shall never come back to it."

"But the Government! and Madame la Baronne!"

"All that does not concern me, Courtin. I am Baron Michel de la Logerie; the estate and Château de la Logerie belong to me, by release from my mother, as soon as I am of age. I shall come of age in eleven months, and your lease runs out in thirteen."

"But suppose I renounce my plan?" said the farmer, with a hypocritical grimace.

"If you do that, you shall have your lease."

"On the same terms as heretofore?"

"On the same terms as heretofore."

"Ah, Monsieur le Baron, if it were not for my fear of compromising you!" said Courtin, taking from the drawer of a desk a little bottle of ink, a sheet of paper, and a pen, which he placed upon the table.

"What's all this?" asked Michel.

"*Dame!* if M. le Baron would be kind enough to put what he has said in writing. We can't tell who may die, and who live; and for my own part — let's see, there's a crucifix — I swear upon the crucifix to M. le Baron —"

"I don't want your oaths, Courtin; for when I leave

here, I return to Souday, and warn Jean Oullier to be on the alert and Bonneville to seek some other shelter."

"Indeed, that's an additional reason," said Courtin, handing the pen to his young master.

Michel took it, and wrote these words upon the paper:—

"I, the undersigned, Auguste François Michel, Baron de la Logerie, agree to renew Courtin's lease on the same terms contained in that which he now holds."

As he was about to insert the date, the farmer stayed his hand.

"No," said he, "don't date it, please, my young master. We will date it the day after your majority."

"Very well," said Michel, and he wrote only his name in addition, leaving space for the subsequent insertion of the date, between the text and the signature.

"If M. le Baron cares to rest more comfortably than on that stool, and is not particular about returning to the château before morning," Courtin suggested, "I will say to M. le Baron: I have a bed upstairs and at his service, which is not the worst that ever was."

"No," replied Michel; "did n't you hear me say that I am going back to Souday?"

"What for? Since M. le Baron has my promise to say nothing, he has no need to hurry."

"What you saw, Courtin, somebody else may have seen, too; and even if you do hold your tongue because you have promised me, another, not bound by any such promise, may speak, so farewell!"

"M. le Baron must do as he pleases," said Courtin; "but he does wrong, very wrong, to return to that rat-trap."

"Very good! I'm obliged for your advice, but I am

very glad that you recognize the fact that I 'm old enough to do as I please."

He rose, as he uttered these words with a firmness of which the farmer believed him to be incapable, and left the house.

Courtin followed him with his eyes until the door closed behind him; then he quickly seized the paper containing the agreement for a lease, read it once more, folded it twice with great care, and put it away in his portfolio.

When he had safely accomplished this undertaking, he thought that he heard voices near the house, and went to the window; drawing the curtain partly aside he saw the baron face to face with his mother.

"Aha! my young cock," said he, "you crow very loud with me, but there 's a mother hen who will lower your crest!"

The baronne, finding that her son did not return, thought that what Courtin had said might be true, and that it would not be very surprising if he were at the farmer's.

She hesitated a moment, partly from pride, and partly from disinclination to go out into the night; but at last her maternal anxiety carried the day, and she wrapped herself in a great shawl and started for the farmhouse.

Just as she reached the door she saw her son come out; and being thereby at once delivered from all her anxiety, as she saw that he was safe and sound, her imperious disposition resumed its sway.

Michel, for his part, recoiled in utter confusion when he saw his parent.

"Follow me, monsieur," said the baronne; "it 's none too early, I think, to return to the château."

It never once occurred to the poor boy to argue or to

make his escape; he followed his mother as docile and passive as any child.

Not a word was exchanged between the mother and son on the way. Indeed, Michel much preferred silence to a discussion, in which his filial respect, let us say rather his weakness of character, would have given him the worst of it.

When they reached the château, day was beginning to break.

The baronne, still dumb, led the young man to his room, where he found a table laid.

"You must be hungry and tired," the baronne remarked; "this is for your hunger, and this for sleep," she added, pointing first to the table and then to the bed.

Whereupon she withdrew, closing the door behind her.

The young man shuddered as he heard the key turn twice in the lock.

He was a prisoner!

He fell into a chair in utter dismay.

Events succeeded one another like an avalanche, and would have made a sturdier will than Baron Michel's bend beneath them. Moreover, he had but a limited amount of energy at best, and he had exhausted it in his scene with Courtin.

Perhaps he had presumed too much upon his strength when he had announced to Courtin that he was going back to the Château de Souday. As his mother had said, he was tired, and he was hungry. At Michel's age Nature is an imperious mistress, and never fails to assert her rights.

The young man's mind was becoming tranquillized to some extent, also; for the baronne's words, "This is for your hunger, and this for sleep," implied that she did

not propose to visit him again until he had eaten and slept; so he had some hours to himself before the impending explanation.

He satisfied his hunger hastily, and went to bed and to sleep, after he had tried the door and found that he was really a prisoner.

He awoke about ten in the morning, and found the rays of a glorious May sun streaming joyously into his room.

He opened the windows.

The birds were singing among the branches, which were just covered with young and tender leaves; the early roses were opening, and the first butterflies flitting about in the sun.

It seemed as if misfortune itself must be a prisoner on such a day, and powerless to injure any one.

The young man took to himself a certain force from this recrudescence of Nature, and awaited his mother with less trepidation.

But the hours rolled on; twelve o'clock struck, and the baronne did not appear.

Michel noticed, with some uneasiness, that the table was furnished with sufficient abundance to supply lunch and dinner for that day, as well as the dinner of the night before; and thereupon he began to fear that his captivity might endure longer than he had imagined.

This fear was confirmed when two o'clock and three o'clock came and went without result.

Suddenly, as he was listening attentively to every sound, were it never so slight, he seemed to hear reports in the direction of Montaigu.

They were so regular that they resembled firing by platoons, but it was impossible, nevertheless, to say that they were caused by the discharge of firearms.

Montaigu was more than two leagues from La Logerie, and a distant thunder-storm might produce almost the same noise.

But no, the sky was cloudless.

The reports lasted about an hour, and then silence reigned again.

The young baron's uneasiness was so great that he had entirely forgotten to eat since the first meal of the day.

Meanwhile he had definitely decided upon one thing; that when night came, and every one in the château was in bed, he would unscrew the lock of his door with his knife and leave the château, not by the front door, which would probably be secured, but by some window.

This possibility of escape restored the prisoner's appetite.

- He dined like a man who expected an exciting night, and was laying in a stock of strength, so that he might be prepared for whatever the night should bring forth.

Michel finished his dinner just before seven o'clock: it would be dark in about an hour, and he threw himself on the bed to wait.

He was very desirous to go to sleep, for a nap would make the time seem much less tedious: but he was too restless. In vain did he close his eyes; his ear, ever on the alert, detected the slightest sound.

He was much amazed that he had not seen his mother since the morning; she must realize that, when night came, he would do his utmost to make his escape.

Doubtless she had some scheme in her mind, but what could it be?

Suddenly the young baron fancied that he heard the jingling of bells such as were commonly attached to the collars of post-horses.

He ran to the window.

He thought he could make out, in the gathering darkness, a little group on the Montaigu road, moving quite rapidly in the direction of the Château de la Logerie.

The noise made by the bells was accompanied by the regular hoof-beats of two horses.

All doubt as to the character of the group was dispelled when the postilion, who was riding one of the horses, cracked his whip vigorously, probably to announce his approach.

At the same moment the young man instinctively glanced down at the out-buildings, where he saw that the servants were drawing his mother's travelling-carriage out of the carriage-house.

A ray of light illumined his brain.

These post-horses from Montaigu, this postilion who cracked his whip so lustily, this travelling-carriage which they were taking out,—there was no more room for doubt; his mother proposed to leave the château, and take him with her! That was why she had locked him up, and kept him locked up. She would come after him when she was already to start, would force him into the carriage with her, and crack would go the whip!

She knew her power over the young fellow so well as to be sure that he would never dare to resist her.

This idea of dependence, which his mother was so positive of, exasperated the young man all the more because he felt how real it was; he knew perfectly well that when he was once face to face with the baronne, he would not dare to break a lance with her.

But to leave Mary, to renounce the life of emotion and excitement in which the sisters had given him his first lessons, to have no part in the drama which the Comte de Bonneville and his unknown companion were

about to perform, in La Vendée,—it seemed impossible to him, and dishonorable to the last degree.

What would the young women think of him?

Michel resolved to run any risk rather than undergo such humiliation.

He went to the window, and measured the distance to the ground; it was almost thirty feet.

He stood for a moment in deep thought; evidently a great struggle was taking place in him.

At last he seemed to come to a fixed decision; he went to his secretary and took out a considerable sum in gold, which he stowed away in his pockets.

At that moment he thought he heard steps in the corridor.

He quickly closed the secretary, lay down upon the bed and waited, but a careful observer might have seen by the unusual firmness of his facial muscles that his resolution was not to be easily shaken.

What was that resolution? In all probability we shall find out sooner or later.

CHAPTER XVII.

AUBIN COURTE-JOIE'S CABARET.

It was perfectly clear,—even to the authorities, who are generally the last ones to ascertain the state of public feeling in such districts as they are called upon to preside over,—it was perfectly clear, we say, that an uprising was in contemplation in Bretagne and La Vendée.

As we have heard Courtin explain to Baronne de la Logerie, the meetings of the Legitimist leaders were a secret to nobody; the names of the modern Bonchamp and D'Elbée, who were expected to assume the lead of the Vendean forces, were known and widely discussed; the old organization into *parishes*, *captaincies*, and *divisions* was revived; the curés refused to intone the *Domine saluum fac regem Philippum*, and offered up prayers at the throne of grace for Henri V., King of France, and Marie-Caroline, “Regent;” lastly, in the departments bordering on the Loire, notably in those of Loire-Inférieure, and Maine-et-Loire, the air was laden with the smell of powder, which precedes great political commotions.

In spite of this general fermentation, perhaps because of it, the Montaigu fair promised to be a great success.

Although it was ordinarily a function of little importance, the peasants turned out in considerable numbers. Men from the Mauges and Retz regions elbowed the citizens of the Bocage and the open country; and an indication of the warlike spirit of all these people was

seen in the great scarcity of the gentler sex among all the broad-brimmed hats and shaggy heads.

Indeed the ladies, who generally constituted the majority of these commercial gatherings, were not to be seen that day at the Montaigu fair. Most significant of all — and it alone would have been enough to impress the least observant with the presence of insurrection in the very air — was the noticeable lack, although customers were plenty, of horses, cows, sheep, butter, and grain, which were usually on hand in abundance.

Whether they had come from Beaupréau, Mortagne, Bressuire, Saint Fulgent, or Machecoul, the peasants, instead of the produce which they usually carted to market, seemed to have brought nothing but their dogwood sticks with leather heads; and from the way in which they grasped them, it seemed as if they had little thought of selling them.

The square and the single broad street of Montaigu, which served as the fair-grounds, had a very solemn aspect, almost menacing, but solemn, beyond question, and in very ill-accord with the received notion of such occasions.

A few boatmen, a few hawkers of wretched drugs, and a few tooth-extractors were on hand; but they beat upon their boxes, puffed away at their copper horns, banged their cymbals, and tried their most excruciating witticisms all in vain; they could not smooth away a single wrinkle from the thoughtful faces of those who passed them without deigning to stop and listen to their music or their chattering.

Like the Bretons, their northern neighbors, the Vendéans are people of few words, in general; on that day they talked even less than usual.

Most of them stood with their backs against the

houses or garden walls, or the wooden bars which enclosed the square, and there they remained motionless, legs crossed, heads bent slightly beneath their broad hats, and hands upon their sticks like so many statues.

Others formed little groups, and these little groups, whose attitude seemed to be one of expectancy were no less silent, strangely enough, than the men who stood by themselves.

The *cabarets* were crowded; cider, *eau-de-vie*, and coffee were consumed in huge quantities, but the Vendean peasant's constitution is so rugged that enormous quantities of liquor have no sensible effect upon his face or behavior. The color of the hard drinkers was a little higher, and their eyes a little brighter, but the men themselves were perfectly sober, and the more watchful because they were suspicious of those who kept the *cabarets* and of the persons they might encounter there.

The fact is that in the towns scattered along the principal roads in Bretagne and La Vendée, the people were, generally speaking, devoted to progressive and liberal opinions; but this tendency, which grew less marked as one turned aside from the great highways, disappeared entirely when one was fairly in the more sparsely populated regions.

Thus, all the citizens of the great centres of population, unless they had given unmistakable proofs of devotion to the Royalist cause, were indiscriminately classed as "patriots" in the mind of the peasant; and they looked upon the patriots as their deadly foes, to whom all the disasters of the great war were attributable, — wherefore they hated them with the deep and deadly hatred which characterizes all civil wars and religious conflicts.

When they visited the fair at Montaigu, which was a centre of population, occupied at that moment by a fly-

ing column of about a hundred men, the denizens of the country districts, walked into the midst of their adversaries. They understood that fact perfectly; that is why they maintained, beneath their peaceful and orderly exterior, the vigilant reserve of a soldier under arms.

A single one of the numerous *cabarets* of Montaigu was kept by a man upon whom the Vendéans could rely, and in whose presence, therefore, they might lay aside all restraint.

This *cabaret* was located in the centre of the town, upon the fair-ground itself, at the corner of the square, and a lane which came out, not in the fields, nor in another street, but on the banks of the Maine, which runs on the southwest side of the town.

This *cabaret* had no sign.

A withered branch of holly, stuck into the wall horizontally, and a few apples which were to be seen through the panes of a window so coated with dirt that no curtain was necessary, indicated to the passer-by the nature of the establishment.

As to the habitués, they had no need of designation.

The proprietor was named Aubin Courte-Joie. Aubin was his family name; Courte-Joie a nickname which he owed to the exuberant fancy of his friends.

It was bestowed upon him under the following circumstances. The part, however unimportant, which Aubin Courte-Joie plays in this narrative, compels us to say a word or two as to his antecedents.

At twenty years, Aubin was so frail and sickly and weak that the conscription of 1812, which did not scrutinize him very closely, rejected him as unworthy of the honors with which his Majesty the Emperor-King ordinarily loaded his conscripts.

But in 1814, the same conscription, being two years

older, had become less bashful ; it came to the conclusion that, all things considered, the object which they had formerly looked upon as a monstrosity represented a number somewhere between one and zero, and might be made, on paper at all events, to contribute to the effect to be produced upon the monarchs of united Europe. Consequently the conscription took Aubin.

But Aubin, who had taken a decided dislike to military service on account of the disdain with which he had been passed over in the first place, determined to defy the Government ; and in pursuance of that determination he made his escape, and took shelter with one of the bands of refractory subjects who were scattered through the province.

As men became harder to get, Messieurs the agents of the Imperial authority became more pitiless in their crusade against the fugitives.

Aubin, whom Nature had not endowed with great self-conceit, would never have believed himself so necessary to the Government, if he had not seen with his own eyes the trouble which the Government took to carry its search for him into the heart of the forests of Bretagne, and the swamps of La Vendée.

The gendarmes pressed the fugitives close.

In one of the resulting skirmishes, Aubin handled his gun with a tenacious courage which proved that the conscription of 1814 was well advised in its desire to number him among the elect ; but he was struck with a bullet and left for dead where he fell.

That same day, a citizeness of Ancenis happened to be driving on the road which follows the river from Ancenis to Nantes.

She was in her gig, and it was something like eight or nine o'clock in the evening,—that is to say, it was quite dark.

Seeing the corpse in the road, the horse stopped short, shivering with fear, and positively declined to go ahead.

The dame struck him with the whip, and he reared. As she continued to whip him, he turned around in his tracks, and undertook to return to Ancenis.

The *bourgeoise*, who was not accustomed to such behavior on the part of her animal, got down from the gig, and the whole trouble was explained.

Aubin's body lay across the road.

Adventures of this sort were of common occurrence at the time, and the good woman was not much alarmed; she tied her horse to a tree and set about dragging Aubin's body into the ditch, to clear the road for her own and other carriages which might pass that way.

But when she touched the body she found it to be still warm.

The pain caused by moving him aroused Aubin to consciousness; he sighed and moved his arms.

The result was that instead of putting him in the ditch, the *bourgeoise* put him in her gig, and returned to Ancenis instead of going on to Nantes.

The good dame was a Royalist, and very devout; the cause in which Aubin had received his wound, and the scapulary she found upon his breast, aroused her profound interest.

She called a surgeon.

Poor Aubin had both legs broken by a ball, and both had to be amputated.

His rescuer nursed Aubin, and looked after his welfare with the devotion of a sister of charity; her kind offices attached her to him who had been the object of them, as is so often the case, and when Aubin had recovered, he was astonished beyond measure when the good woman offered him her heart and hand.

It goes without saying that he accepted, and became thereupon, to the bewilderment of the whole province, a small landed proprietor.

But alas! Aubin's good fortune was of short duration; his wife died at the end of a year. She had taken the precaution to make a will leaving him all her property; but her heirs-at-law attacked the will on technical grounds, and the Nantes tribunal having given judgment in their favor, the poor deserter found himself as badly off as before. No, we are wrong, for he had two legs less than before.

It was no more than natural, considering the brief life of his opulence, that the inhabitants of Montaigu — who had not failed, as we can imagine, to envy him, and to rejoice at the speedy wreck of his incredible luck — should wittily add to his name of Aubin the sobriquet of Courte-Joie.

Now, the heirs-at-law, who had procured the setting aside of the will, belonged to the liberal party; and Aubin could do no less than include the whole party in the wrath caused by the loss of his law-suit. And so he did — conscientiously.

Soured by his maimed condition, embittered by what seemed to him frightful injustice, Aubin Courte-Joie bore to all whom he accused of his misfortunes, — adversaries, judges, and patriots, — a bitter hatred, which succeeding events had kept alive, and which only awaited a favorable opportunity to vent itself in deeds, which his gloomy and vindictive temperament promised to render terrible.

With his double infirmity, it was out of the question for him to think of resuming his former employment in the fields, and of becoming a tenant-farmer as his father and grandfather before him had been.

He was compelled therefore, notwithstanding his invincible repugnance to town-life, to seek his livelihood in a town; he gathered together the remnants of his ephemeral opulence, and settled down among those whom he detested (even at Montaigu itself), in the *cabaret* where we find him eighteen years subsequent to the events we have narrated.

Royalist opinions had not, in 1832, a more enthusiastic adherent than Aubin Courte-Joie. By doing his utmost to spread those opinions, was he not accomplishing his own vengeance?

Notwithstanding his two wooden legs, Aubin Courte-Joie was the most active and intelligent promoter of the movement which was in contemplation.

An advanced outpost in the very camp of the enemy, he kept the Vendean chiefs fully informed of all the defensive preparations undertaken by the Government, not in the canton of Montaigu alone, but in all the neighboring cantons as well.

Wandering beggars, transient guests, whom no one deemed of consequence, and who were never looked upon with suspicion, were in his hands most effective auxiliaries, whom he used as spies and go-betweens to the country people, throughout a circle twenty leagues in diameter.

His *cabaret* was the natural rendezvous of those who were called Chouans; it was, as we have said, the only one in which they did not feel forced to repress or dissemble their Royalist proclivities.

The day of the Montaigu fair, his *cabaret* did not at first seem to be so well supplied with customers, as one might have expected by reason of the large concourse of countrymen.

In the first of the two rooms of which it was com-

posed, a gloomy, dark hole, furnished with a rough wooden bar, and a few benches and stools, a half score of peasants at most were sitting about. The neatness, we had almost said the elegance, of their dress, made it easy to see that they belonged to the well-to-do class of tenant-farmers.

This first room was separated from the second by a wide window, covered with curtains made of red and white cotton.

The second room served at once as kitchen, dining-room, bedroom, and office for the proprietor, and was also used on great occasions as an annex to the public room; he sometimes received his particular friends there.

The furniture indicated the fivefold use of the room.

At one end there was a very low bed, with canopy and curtains of green serge; it evidently was intended for the proprietor.

The bed was flanked by two enormous casks, whence cider and *eau-de-vie* were drawn, as ordered by the customers.

At the right, as one entered, was the fireplace, broad and high as fireplaces always are in cottages; in the middle of the room was an oaken table surrounded by a double bench; opposite the fireplace, a sideboard laden with plates and pewter-mugs.

A crucifix surmounted by a branch of consecrated box-wood, a few wax figures of saints, and some gaudy pictures, furnished all the decoration of the apartment.

On Montaigu fair day Aubin Courte-Joie opened what might be called his "holy of holies" to numerous friends.

Although there were no more than ten or twelve customers in the public room, there were more than

twenty in the back shop, most of whom were sitting around the table, drinking and talking eagerly.

Three or four were engaged in emptying great bags which lay heaped up in a corner, taking round biscuit from them, counting them, and placing them in baskets, which they then passed over, some to beggars, and some to women, who made their appearance at a door in the corner near the casks.

This door opened upon a little court, which led to the lane we have mentioned.

Aubin Courte-Joie was sitting in a sort of wooden easy-chair near the fireplace; at his side was a man in a goat-skin coat, with a black linen cap, in whom we meet once more our old acquaintance Jean Oullier, with his dog lying between his feet.

Behind them, Courte-Joie's niece, a pretty young peasant-girl, whom he employed to wait upon his customers, was stirring the fire, and keeping her eye on a dozen brown glasses, in which the decoction called by the peasants "toasted cider" was gently simmering by the heat of the fire.

Aubin Courte-Joie was talking very earnestly, though in an undertone, to Jean Oullier, when a low whistle in imitation of the partridge's cry of alarm was heard in the public room.

"Who's coming?" cried Courte-Joie, leaning over to look through a little hole he had made in the curtains. "The man from La Logerie. Attention!"

Before the warning word reached the ears of those to whom it was addressed, everything was in order in Courte-Joie's apartment.

The little door had softly closed, and the beggars and the women had disappeared.

The men who were counting the biscuit had closed

the bags and piled them up, and were sitting in careless attitudes, smoking their pipes.

Those who were drinking had become as silent as the grave, and three or four had gone to sleep on the table as if by enchantment.

Jean Oullier turned toward the fireplace in such a manner as to hide his features from the first glance of those who should enter the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN FROM LA LOGERIE.

COURTIN — for it was he whom Courte-Joie designated as “the man from La Logerie” — had, in fact, entered the outer room of the *cabaret*.

Save the low cry, so well counterfeited that any one would have taken it to be the cry of a tame partridge, which had served to give warning of his arrival, his presence seemed to create no sensation whatever in the public room; the drinkers continued to talk, but their conversation lost its former serious tone, and became very lively and noisy.

The farmer looked about, and apparently failed to find the face he was looking for; thereupon he boldly opened the door leading to the second room, and showed his marten's face in the doorway.

Here again, no one seemed to pay any attention to him, except that Mariette, Aubin Courte-Joie's niece, whose place it was to attend to customers, desisted for a moment from her solicitous oversight of the glasses of cider, stood up, and asked Courtin, as she would have asked any one of the habitués of her uncle's establishment, —

“What will you have, Monsieur Courtin?”

“A cup of coffee,” replied Courtin, scanning one after another the features of all those who occupied the benches, and gazing into every corner of the room.

“Very well; take a seat,” said Mariette; “I will bring it to you at once.”

"Oh, it's not worth while," replied Courtin, good-humoredly; "just hand me the cup right here, and I'll drink it at the fire with my friends."

No one seemed to take offence at Courtin's description of himself, — or perhaps it would be better to say, at the term which he applied to those who were present; but no one moved to make room for him.

Courtin therefore was compelled to try another mode of attack.

"Are you very well, *gars* Aubin?" he asked, turning to the inn-keeper.

"As you see," was his reply, without even turning his head.

It was easy for Courtin to perceive that he was not welcomed by the assemblage with extraordinary cordiality; but he was not the man to be discouraged so early in the game.

"Come, Mariette," said he, "give me a stool so that I can sit down by your uncle."

"There are none, Master Courtin," the girl replied; "your eyes, thank God, are strong enough to see that."

"Oh, well! your uncle will give me his," said Courtin, with impudent familiarity, although in reality he was little encouraged by the attitude of the inn-keeper and his guests.

"If I absolutely must," growled Aubin Courte-Joie, "I will give it to you; for I am the master of the house, and it shall not be said that at the Holly Branch any man was refused a seat who wanted to sit down."

"Then give me your seat, as you say, my glib talker; for I see the man I'm looking for here."

"Whom are you looking for, pray?" queried Aubin, rising; on the instant twenty stools were offered him.

"I am looking for Jean Oullier, my friend," said Courtin, "and it's my opinion that that's the man there."

As he heard his name pronounced, Jean also rose, and demanded in a tone that was almost a threat,—

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"Well, well, you need n't eat me up for that!" retorted the mayor of La Logerie. "What I have to say to you is of more consequence to you than to me."

"Master Courtin," rejoined Jean, in a solemn voice, "we are not friends, although you just said that we were; indeed, taking everything into account, you must know it altogether too well to have come among us for any good purpose."

"Oh, no! that's where you're mistaken, *gars* Oullier."

"Master Courtin," continued Jean Oullier, without heeding the warning signs Aubin Courte-Joie was making him, "since our acquaintance began you have been a 'Blue,' and you have bought bad goods."

"Bad goods?" interposed the farmer, with his crafty smile.

"Oh, I know what I'm talking about, and so do you, perfectly well. I mean goods coming from a bad source. You have been in alliance with the greedy dogs in the large towns; you have persecuted the poor folk in the villages and hamlets, who have preserved their faith in God and the king. Tell me, then, what there can be in common between you, who have done that, and me, who have done just the opposite?"

"No," rejoined Courtin; "no, *gars* Oullier, I have not sailed in your waters, it is true; but although I belong to a different party from yours, I say that neighbors ought not to wish one another ill. So I have

been looking for you, and have come to do you a service, I swear."

"I want none of your services, Master Courtin," retorted Jean.

"Why not?" asked the farmer.

"Because I am sure that there's some treachery hidden under them."

"So you refuse to listen to me?"

"I do," replied the huntsman, roughly.

"You are wrong," said the inn-keeper under his breath; his companion's frank and straightforward severity seemed to him bad policy.

"Very well, then," said Courtin, slowly, "if anything happens to the inmates of the Château de Souday, blame nobody but yourself, *gars* Oullier."

There was evidently a deep meaning in Courtin's way of pronouncing the word "inmates;" that word certainly included the *guests*. Jean Oullier did not fail to grasp his meaning, and in spite of his tremendous will-power, he changed color.

He regretted that he had been so hasty, but it was dangerous to retreat from the position he had taken.

If Courtin had his suspicions, such a retreat would only confirm them.

Therefore Oullier bent his energies to mastering his emotion, and sat down again, turning his back upon Courtin with the utmost indifference. His manner was so unconcerned that Courtin, shrewd as he was, allowed himself to be taken in by it.

He did not leave the room with the precipitate haste which would have been the consistent sequel of this rejoinder, but fumbled a long while in his leather purse, trying to find the small change to pay for his coffee.

Aubin Courte-Joie understood his motive in delaying, and seized the opportunity to put in a word.

"My Jean," said he to Oullier, with perfect good-humor, — "my Jean, for a long while we have been friends, and have travelled the same road; here are my two wooden legs to prove it! Very well, I am not afraid to say to you, before M. Courtin, that you are wrong; do you hear? So long as a hand is closed, no one but a fool will say, 'I know what it contains.' To be sure, M. Courtin," continued Aubin, persisting in bestowing the title upon the mayor of La Logerie, "to be sure, M. Courtin is not one of us; but he has not been against us either. He has been for M. Courtin; that's the worst reproach we can bring against him. But to-day the old quarrels are extinct, to-day there are no more Blues or Chouans; to-day we are at peace, praise God, and what does it matter what color his cockade is? And, if M. Courtin has, as he says, good things to tell you, why, in God's name, don't you listen to them?"

Jean Oullier shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Old fox!" thought Courtin, who was altogether too well posted as to what was going on to be led astray by the flowers of peaceful rhetoric, with which Courte-Joie thought proper to adorn his discourse.

"So much the better," he said aloud, "as politics have nothing to do with what I want to say to him."

"There, you see," said Courte-Joie, "there is no reason why you should n't come to an understanding with M. le Maire. Come, come, make room for him at your side, and you can talk at your ease."

All this did not persuade Jean Oullier to adopt a more conciliatory tone with Courtin, or even to turn toward him. But he did not rise — which was to be feared — when he felt that the farmer was taking his place beside him.

"*Gars Oullier*," said Courtin, by way of preface, "it's my opinion that the best interviews are those which are well-watered. 'Wine makes honeyed words,' our curé used to say,—not at the altar, but that did not prevent his remark from being the truth. If we should drink a bottle, it might make my words take root."

"As you please," replied Jean, who, while feeling the utmost repugnance to drink with Courtin, looked upon that as one of the sacrifices necessary to be made for the cause to which he had devoted himself.

"Have you wine?" Courtin inquired of Mariette.

"Oh, the idea!" she replied. "Have we wine! That's a pretty question!"

"Good wine, I mean,—bottled wine."

"We have bottled wine," said Mariette, with a proud toss of the head; "but it's worth forty sous the bottle."

"Bah!" exclaimed Aubin, who had taken his place on the other side of the fireplace in order to seize, if possible, on the wing, some part of Courtin's forthcoming confidential communication. "M. le Maire is a man of means, little one, and forty sous will never prevent him from paying his rent to Madame la Baronne Michel."

Courtin regretted his forwardness. If times like those of the great war were to return, by ill luck, it would be dangerous to have the reputation of being too rich.

"Means!" he repeated; "means! how you go on, *gars* Aubin! Yes, I certainly have means to pay my rent; but when that is paid, believe me, I think myself very fortunate if I can make both ends meet. That's how rich I am!"

"Whether you're rich or poor, it's none of our business," retorted Jean. "Come, say what you have to say, and be quick about it!"





LOUIS PHILIPPE.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, I. 201.

Courtin took the bottle Mariette handed him, carefully brushed the neck with his sleeve, poured a few drops of wine into his glass, filled Jean Oullier's, then his own, and slowly sipped a swallow or two.

"They are not to be pitied," he said, smacking his tongue against the roof of his mouth, "who drink such wine as that every day."

"Especially if they drink it with a clear and tranquil conscience," said Jean Oullier; "for that is what makes wine good, in my judgment."

"Jean Oullier," rejoined Courtin, without commenting upon his interlocutor's philosophical reflection, and leaning over the hearth, so as to be heard only by him whom he addressed, "you bear malice against me, and you are wrong; upon my word of honor, it is myself who tell you so."

"Prove it, and I will believe you. That's the confidence I have in you."

"I wish you no ill. I wish myself well, as was just said by Aubin Courte-Joie,—who's a man of sense,—and that's all there is to it; that's not a great crime, it seems to me. I look after my little affairs without meddling much with those of other people; because, I say to myself, 'My goodman, if when Easter comes, or Christmas, you have n't got your money ready in your little purse, the king, whether he's called Henri V. or Louis Philippe, won't care about anything but your tax, and you will receive a paper bearing his image,—which will be a great honor to you, but will cost you dear. So just let Henri V. and Louis Philippe arrange matters to suit themselves, and do you look out for yourself.' You reason differently, I know; and that's your affair. I don't blame you, and the best I can do is to pity you."

"Keep your pity for others, Master Courtin," returned Jean Oullier, scornfully. "I have no use for it, I promise you, any more than I have for your confidences."

"When I say 'I pity you,' *gars* Oullier, I mean to speak of your master as well as yourself, — M. le Marquis, whom I venerate. He was all cut to pieces in the great war, and what did he gain by it?"

"Master Courtin, you said that you were not going to talk politics with me. You are already breaking your word, are you not?"

"Yes, I said so, I know; but it isn't my fault if politics is so tangled up with all our affairs in this accursed country that you can't keep them apart! I was saying, my *gars* Oullier, that M. le Marquis is a man whom I revere, and that it grieves me, grieves me, deeply, to see him, who formerly was the foremost man in the province, overshadowed by a gang of *parvenus*."

"If he is content with his lot, what business is it of yours?" said Jean. "You never heard him complain, did you? And he has never tried to borrow money of you."

"What would you say to a man who should suggest to you a means of restoring to the Château de Souday all the glory and wealth which have flown away from it? Come, now," said Courtin, ignoring the brutal frankness of his interlocutor, "do you think that such a man would be your enemy? And does n't it seem to you that M. le Marquis would owe him a debt of gratitude? Come, answer squarely, as I speak to you."

"Most assuredly, if the man of whom you speak proposed to do all this by honorable means; but I doubt it."

"Honorable means! Would any one dare to suggest any other to you, Jean Oullier? Look you, *gars*, I

am as straight as a string, and I don't look all ways at once. I am able — I, who speak to you — to bring it about that hundreds and thousands will be more common at the Château de Souday than crowns are to-day; but —

“But what? Ah, there's where the shoe pinches, is n't it?”

“But — Why, I must make something out of it myself.”

“If it's all right, that's no more than fair, and you shall have your share.”

“That's so, is n't it? And what I ask for putting the thing through is a mere trifle, after all.”

“But what do you ask?” queried Jean Oullier, who was beginning to have some curiosity as to Courtin's plan.

“Oh, *mon Dieu!* it's as simple as good-morning! In the first place, I should like to have it arranged so that I should have no more leases to renew and no more rent to pay for the farm I have been occupying for twelve years.”

“That is to say, you want us to give it to you?”

“If M. le Marquis chose, I would not refuse it, you understand. No, I am not my own enemy to that extent.”

“But how can that be arranged? Your farm belongs to young Michel or his mother; I have never heard that they wanted to sell. How could he give you what does n't belong to him?”

“That's all right!” continued Courtin. “But if I take hold of the scheme I propose to you, perhaps it would not be very long before the farm would belong to you, or almost the same thing; and then it would be a simple matter. What do you say to that?”

"I say that I fail to understand you, Master Courtin."

"Droll dog! Ah, what a fine *parti* our young man would be! Do you know that, besides La Logerie, he owns La Coudraie, the mills of La Ferronnerie, and the wood of Gervaise; and that all that, good years and bad years, yields fully eight thousand pistoles? Do you know that the old baronne has as much more to go to him?—after her death, of course."

"What has young Michel in common with M. le Marquis de Souday?" said Oullier; "and in what way is my master interested in your master's fortune?"

"Come, now, play fair, my *gars* Oullier. *Pardieu!* you can't have failed to see that our Monsieur is in love with one of your young ladies,—and dead in love, too! Which one, I've no idea; but just let M. le Marquis say one word, let him give me a bit of writing concerning the farm. Once married, the girl—they are clever as flies—will rule her husband, and will get whatever she wants out of him. He will never think of refusing her a few paltry arpents, especially when it is proposed to give them to a man to whom he also will be overflowing with gratitude. Thus I do my own business and yours too. There is only one stumbling-block, do you see, and that's the mother. But I will take it upon myself to remove that obstacle," added Courtin, leaning toward Jean Oullier.

That individual made no reply, but gazed steadfastly at the farmer.

"Yes," continued the mayor of La Logerie. "When we are all agreed, Madame la Baronne will have nothing to say in opposition. You see, my Oullier," he added, slapping Jean a friendly blow upon the leg, "I know a thing or two about M. Michel."

"What use have you for us, then? What is there

to prevent you from demanding from her at once what you are ambitious to have?"

"This is what prevents me: That I must be able to fortify the statement of a boy who, while tending sheep, heard the bargain concluded, with the testimony of a man who saw the blood-money paid in the wood of La Chabotière. And you, Jean Oullier, know better than any one else who is the man to give this testimony. The day when we make common cause, the baronne will become as pliable as a handful of putty in our hands. She is miserly, but she is even more proud. The fear of public disgrace, and the gossip of the neighborhood, will bring her to reason very soon. She will find that Mademoiselle de Souday, poor as she is, and illegitimate, is, after all, quite the equal of Baron Michel, whose grandfather was a common peasant like ourselves, and whose father was—never mind what! Your young woman will be rich, our young man will be happy, and I shall be very well off. What is there to object to all this? And in addition, we shall be friends, my *gars* Oullier. And vanity aside, while I am ambitious of your friendship, I think that mine is of some value."

"Your friendship!" exclaimed Jean Oullier, who had great difficulty in holding back the wrath which Courtin's extraordinary scheme aroused in him.

"Yes, my friendship. Shake your head if you please; it's as I say. I told you that I knew as much as any one about M. Michel's life; I might have added that I know more than any one about his death. I was one of the beaters of the cover where he was shot, and my place in the line brought me just opposite where he was stationed. I was very young, and had already formed the habit—which God preserve to me!—of chattering only when my own interest required. Now,

do you reckon as nought the services which your party may expect from me, when my interest leads me to your ranks?"

"Master Courtin," replied Jean Oullier, frowning darkly, "I have no influence over M. le Marquis de Souday's actions. But if I had any, however small it might be, that farm would never come into the family; and if it should happen to, it never would be used to pay for treason!"

"Fine words! fine words!" said Courtin.

"No; poor as Mesdemoiselles de Souday may be, I would never give one of them to the young man you mention. Rich as that young man may be, and even if he bore a different name, Mademoiselle de Souday should never purchase an alliance with him or anybody else by a shameful act."

"You call that shameful, do you? As for me, I see in it only a very neat stroke of business."

"Very likely. But for those whose servant I am, to buy an alliance with M. Michel, by a bargain with you, would be worse than shameful; it would be infamous!"

"Jean Oullier, look out! I want to continue your good friend without disturbing myself too much over your lack of courtesy. I came to you with kind intentions; look out that they are not changed to bad ones when I leave here."

"I care as little for your threats as for your advances, Master Courtin. Consider that as said; but if I must repeat it, I will do so."

"Once more, Jean Oullier, listen to me. I want to be rich, as I have confessed to you. That's the bee in my bonnet, as yours is to remain faithful as a dog to people who bother their heads less about you than you do about your spaniel. I thought that I might be

useful to your master, and I hoped that he would not let such a service go unrewarded. It is impossible, you say? Let us say no more about it; but if the nobles whom you serve choose to show their gratitude in a way I like, I should rather oblige them than the others, I tell you once more."

"Because you hope that the nobles will pay you better than the others, is n't it?"

"Of course, my Jean Oullier. I don't affect pride with you, and it's just as you say; and as you also said just now, if I must repeat it, I will do so."

"I won't be a go-between in any such bargains, Master Courtin. Besides, the reward I should have to propose for you, if it were in proportion to what they might expect from you, would be so small as not to be worth talking about."

"What! Who knows? You did n't suspect, my boy, that I knew of the La Chabotière business! Perhaps I could astonish you considerably if I should tell you all I know."

Jean Oullier was afraid to appear alarmed.

"Look you," said he, "there's enough of that. If you want to sell yourself, apply to somebody else; such bargains would go against my grain, even if I were in a position to make them. But they don't concern me, thank God!"

"Is that your last word, Jean Oullier?"

"My first and my last. Follow your road, Master Courtin, and leave us to ours."

"Very well, so much the worse," said Courtin, rising; "for, upon my soul, I should have been very glad to go with your people."

As he spoke, Courtin nodded to Oullier, and left the room.

He had scarcely crossed the threshold when Aubin Courte-Joie stumped up to Jean Oullier on his two wooden legs.

"You made a fool of yourself," he said, in a low voice.

"What should I have done?"

"Taken him to Louis Renaud or Gaspard; they would have bought him."

"What! that miserable traitor?"

"My Jean, in 1815, when I was mayor, I was once at Nantes. I saw there a man named —, who was, or had been, a minister of State; and I heard him say two things that I've never forgotten. One was, that traitors make and unmake empires; the other, that treason is the only thing in this world which is not measured by the size of the man who commits it."

"What do you advise me to do now?"

"Follow him, and watch him."

Jean Oullier thought a moment; then he too rose, saying, —

"Faith, I believe you're right."

And he went out with an anxious countenance.

CHAPTER XIX.

MONTAIGU FAIR.

THE effervescence in the west of France did not take the Government by surprise.

Political ties held too lightly for an insurrection which covered such a vast extent of territory, and included so many conspirators, to remain long secret.

Even before the appearance of Madame upon the coast of Provence, information of the projected movement had been received at Paris, and prompt and vigorous measures of repression had been determined upon. The moment that it became certain that the princesse was on her way to the western provinces, steps were at once taken to put these measures into execution, and to intrust the direction of affairs to reliable and skilful men.

The departments in which an uprising was feared were divided into military arrondissements which corresponded with the sub-prefectures.

Each of these arrondissements, commanded by a *chef de bataillon*, was the centre of several secondary cantonments, commanded by captains, under whom still smaller detachments commanded by lieutenants or sub-lieutenants served as outposts, and made their way as far into the less thickly settled regions as facility of communication would allow.

Montaigu, in the arrondissement of Clisson, had a garrison consisting of a company of the Thirty-second regiment of the Line.

The day when the events we have described were taking place, this garrison was reinforced by two brigades of gendarmerie, which had left Nantes that same morning, and by about a score of mounted chasseurs.

The latter body acted as escort to a general officer from the garrison of Nantes, who was making a tour of inspection of the various detachments.

This general officer was General Dermoncourt.

Having concluded his inspection of the garrison of Montaigu, Dermoncourt, an old soldier, intelligent and energetic, thought that it would not be a bad plan to supplement his duty by an inspection of those whom he called his old friends, the Vendéans, whom he had noticed standing around upon the square and in the street of Montaigu, in such large numbers.

He exchanged his uniform for civilian's clothes, and went out into the midst of the crowd, accompanied by a member of the civil service who happened to be at Montaigu at the time.

Although still gloomy, and in a measure ominous, the demeanor of the populace was outwardly tranquil.

The crowd opened to make way for the two gentlemen, and although the martial set-up of the general, his thick mustache, still black for all his sixty-five years, and his scarred face, as well as the self-conscious air of his companion, betrayed their identity to the keen curiosity of the multitude and rendered the disguise almost useless, not a sign of hostile feeling disturbed their walk.

"Well, well," said the general, "my old friends the Vendéans have n't changed much; they're as uncommunicative as they were when I left them thirty-eight years ago."

"There seems to me to be a difference, from which I augur well," said the civil servant in a very important

tone. "The two months which I passed at Paris, during which every day had its *émeute*, gave me some experience in such matters, and I think I can say that this is not the demeanor of a people on the eve of insurrection. Look, my dear general; few groups collected, — none at all, indeed; not a single orator in full blast; no animation, no whispering, but perfect tranquillity! Pshaw! these people are thinking of their petty business affairs, and of nothing else in the world, I'd take my oath."

"You are right, my dear sir, and I am entirely of your opinion: these worthy folk, as you call them, are thinking of absolutely nothing but their own business; but this business of theirs is to find the best way of retailing the leaden bullets and sword blades which form the bulk of their stock for the time being, and which they expect to try upon us at the earliest possible moment."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think so, for I am sure of it. If the religious element were not wanting, luckily for us, in this new girding on of bucklers, and if that fact did not make me think that it cannot be general, I would boldly take my oath that there is n't one of these rascals in his homespun coat, linen breeches, and brogans who has n't his allotted station and number in one of the battalions which Messieurs the nobles are enrolling."

"What! the beggars too?"

"The beggars above all. The peculiar thing about this war, my dear sir, is that we are dealing with an enemy who is everywhere and nowhere; you look for him, and you see simply a peasant like one of these, who salutes us, a beggar who holds out his hand for alms, a peddler who offers his merchandise for sale, a musician

who fractures the drum of your ear with his trumpet, a quack peddling his drugs, a little goatherd who smiles at you, a woman nursing her baby at the door of her cabin, or a perfectly honest and perfectly harmless bush leaning over the road; and you pass on unsuspecting. But peasant, goatherd, beggar, musician, quack, woman, peddler, are one and all enemies! Even the bush is one! Some, crawling along in the underbrush, follow you like your shadow, pursuing their occupation of unwearied espionage, and at the slightest suspicious movement they warn those whom you are after, long before you can surprise them. Another has picked up in a ditch under the hedge, or under the grass in a fallow field, a long rusty gun; and if you are worth the trouble, he will follow you, like the first, until he has a good opportunity at suitable range. They are sparing of their powder. The bush will fire a shot at you; and if you are lucky enough to be missed by the bush, when you go and search it, you find a bush and nothing more,—branches, that is to say, and thorns and leaves. That's how harmless they are in this country, my dear monsieur."

"Don't you exaggerate a bit, general?" said the official, incredulously.

"*Pardieu!* we can try it, Monsieur le Sous-préfet. Here we are in the midst of a perfectly peaceful and quiet crowd; there are none but friends about us,—Frenchmen, fellow-citizens. But just order the arrest of one of these fellows!"

"What would happen if I should do so?"

"It would happen that some one of them whom we don't know—perhaps that young fellow in a white frock, or perhaps that beggar who is eating so heartily on yonder doorstep, and who might turn out to be Diot Jambe-d'Argent, Bras-de-Fer, or some other leader of a

band — would rise and give a signal; whereupon a dozen or fifteen of those clubs which are walking up and down would beat about our heads, and before my escort could come to our aid, we should be pulverized like two kernels of wheat beneath a flail. You don't seem to be convinced; you evidently want to try the experiment."

"Indeed, I believe you, general; yes, indeed I do!" cried the sub-prefect hastily. "No bad jokes, in God's name! Since you have enlightened me as to their intentions, all their faces seem doubly sombre; they all look to me like veritable rascals."

"Oh, no; they are fine fellows, very fine fellows! Only one must know how to take them; and, unfortunately, all those who are sent to them have n't sufficient tact," said the general, with a significant smile. "Would you like to hear a specimen of their conversation? You are, or have been, or ought to be, a lawyer; but I will wager that you never met among your professional brethren a rascal so clever at talking, without saying anything, as these fellows are. *Hallo, gars!*" continued the general, accosting a peasant of thirty-five or forty years, who was walking around them, intently examining a cake he had in his hand. "*Hallo, gars!* tell me where they sell such nice cakes as the one you have there. It makes my mouth water just to look at it."

"They are not for sale, monsieur; they're given away."

"*Peste!* but that convinces me that I would like one."

"It's very strange," said the peasant; "it's very strange, all the same, that they give away thus fine white wheat cakes, which they might sell!"

"Yes, it is strange; but it's no less so that the first

person we fall in with not only replies to our questions, but anticipates those we might ask. Show me your cake, pray, my good fellow."

The general looked closely at the object the peasant handed him.

It was a simple cake of flour and milk; but before it was cooked, a cross and four parallel bars had been cut with a knife upon the crust.

"The devil! such a gift is so much the more acceptable in that it combines the useful with the agreeable. This pretty little design must be a rebus. Tell me, my man, who gave it to you?"

"Nobody gave it to me; they are suspicious of me."

"Indeed! are you a patriot?"

"I am mayor of my village, and I am for the Government. I saw a woman handing cakes like this to people from Machecoul, who did n't ask for them, and offered her nothing in exchange. Then I asked her to sell me one, and she did n't dare to refuse. I took two, ate one in her presence, and put the other, this one, in my pocket."

"Will you give it to me, my good fellow? I am making a collection of puzzles, and this one interests me."

"I can give it or sell it to you, as you choose."

"Aha!" Dermoncourt exclaimed, regarding his interlocutor more attentively than before. "I think I understand; you can explain these hieroglyphics?"

"Perhaps so; and I can surely furnish you with other information not to be despised."

"But you want to be paid for it?"

"To be sure," said the peasant, boldly.

"So that 's the way you serve the Government which made you mayor?"

"*Parbleu!* the Government has n't put a tiled roof on my house, or changed the plaster walls to stone walls. It is roofed with thatch, and built of wood and earth; it catches fire easily, burns quickly, and there is nothing left but ashes. He who risks much ought to be paid in proportion; for all that, you understand, may easily be destroyed in one night."

"You are right. Come, Monsieur Administrator, this affair is in your line. Thank God, I am only a soldier, and goods must be paid for before they are delivered to me. So pay for what he knows, and turn it over to me."

"Be quick about it," said the farmer, "for they're watching us on all sides."

In fact, the peasants had gradually drawn near the little group formed by the two gentlemen and their compatriot. Without other apparent motive than the curiosity which strangers always arouse, they had finally formed a complete circle around the three men.

The general observed this fact, and said aloud to the sub-prefect, "My dear fellow, I don't advise you to trust this man's word; he sells you two hundred bags of oats at nineteen francs the bag, and it remains to be seen if he will deliver them. Give him something as earnest money, and let him sign a contract."

"But I have no paper or pencil," said the sub-prefect, grasping the general's meaning.

"Go to the hotel, then. Come," the general continued, "is there anybody else with oats to sell? We have a number of horses to feed."

A peasant replied in the affirmative; and while the general was haggling with him about the price, the sub-prefect and the man with the cake were able to walk away without comment.

This man, as our readers must have guessed, was no other than Courtin.

Let us try to explain the manœuvres he had executed since morning.

After his interview with his young master, he had reflected long and carefully.

It seemed to him that denunciation, pure and simple, would not be most profitable to him from a selfish standpoint; for it might be that the Government would fail to reward such an act by one of its subordinate agents. In that case he would have taken a great risk without profit; for his act would draw upon his head the hatred of the Royalists, who were very numerous in the canton.

Then he had concocted the little scheme which we have heard him outline to Jean Oullier.

He hoped, while helping on the love affair of the young baron, and receiving reasonable compensation, to get into the good graces of the Marquis de Souday, — whose whole ambition would, he supposed, be fulfilled by such an alliance, — and by that means to succeed in selling at a high figure his own silence, which would insure the safety of a head which, if he was not mistaken, was very precious to the Royalist party.

We have seen how Jean Oullier received Courtin's advances. Thereupon the latter, disappointed in what seemed to him a most promising piece of work, decided to be content with a less brilliant stroke, and to sell his wares to the Government.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ÉMEUTE.

HALF an hour after the conference between Courtin and the sub-prefect, a gendarme circulated among the groups, seeking the general, whom he found talking in a very friendly way with a respectable beggar covered with rags. The gendarme said a few words in the officer's ear, and the latter hurried back to the Cheval Blanc.

The sub-prefect was awaiting him at the door.

"Well?" the general asked, observing the satisfied expression of the functionary.

"Ah, general, great news, and good news!" he replied.

"Let's hear it."

"The man I have been talking with is really very clever."

"Fine news, that! That's what they all are, — very clever! The biggest fool among them would be a match for M. de Talleyrand. What did this very clever man say to you?"

"Night before last he saw the Comte de Bonneville, disguised as a peasant, arrive at the Château de Souday, and with him another little peasant, who seemed to him to be a woman in man's clothes."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, general, there is no doubt —"

"Go on, Monsieur le Sous-préfet; you see how impatient I am," said the general, in the calmest of tones.

"I mean to say, that in my opinion there is no doubt that the woman he saw is the one we have been told to be on the lookout for, — the princesse, that is."

"You may have no doubt of it; but I have very serious doubts."

"Why so, general?"

"Because I have been receiving confidences, too."

"Voluntary or involuntary?"

"How can any one tell, with such people as these?"

"But what did they tell you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, but —"

"Well, when you left me I kept on buying oats."

"Yes, and then?"

"The peasant with whom I was bargaining asked for earnest money, which was no more than fair. I asked him for a receipt, which was quite as fair a request as his. He wanted to go to some shop or other to write it. 'Pshaw!' said I, 'here's a pencil, and you must have a bit of paper about you; my hat will do for a table.' He tore a piece off a letter, and gave me his receipt. Here it is; read it."

The sub-prefect took the paper, and read: —

"Received from M. Jean Louis Robier the sum of fifty francs on account of payment for thirty bags of oats which I agree to deliver to him on the 28th inst.

F. TERRIEN.

14th May 1832.

"Well, I can't find any information in that, upon my word," remarked the sub-prefect.

"Turn the paper over, please."

"Aha!" exclaimed the sub-prefect.

The paper which he held in his hand was half of

a letter which had been torn through the middle. On the reverse he read the following lines:—

arquis.
ment received the news
she whom we expect
Beaufays on the 26th
officers of your division
presented to Madame.
people on the alert.
respectfully,
oux.

"Devil take me!" exclaimed the sub-prefect, "this is nothing more nor less than notice of an uprising; for it is easy to fill in what is missing."

"Nothing easier," said the general. "Perhaps, indeed, it's too easy," he added, in an undertone.

"Faith! what were you just saying to me about the cunning of these people?" said the functionary. "I should say, on the other hand, that they are abnormally innocent."

"But wait a moment!" said Dermoncourt, "this is not all."

"Indeed!"

"After leaving my oat-merchant, I accosted a beggar, — a sort of idiot. I spoke to him of God, his saints, the Virgin, and the buckwheat and apple crops, — notice that the apple-trees are in bloom; — and I ended by asking him if he would be our guide to Loroux, where we are to go next on our tour of inspection, you remember. 'I can't,' replied my idiot, with a sly look. 'Why not?' I asked, with the most innocent expression I could assume. 'Because I am ordered to guide a beautiful lady and two gentlemen, like you, from Puy Laurens to La Flocelière,' he said."

"Oh, the devil! that complicates matters, does n't it?"

"On the contrary, it simplifies them."

"Explain yourself."

"Confidential communications which come without the asking, in this country where they are so difficult to obtain when one is seeking them, are traps set altogether too bunglingly for such an old fox as I am to get caught in them. The Duchesse de Berry, if she comes into the affair at all, can't be at Souday, at Beaufays, and at Puy Laurens all at once. Come, how does it strike you, my dear sub-prefect?"

"*Dame!*" rejoined the perplexed officer, "I think that she has been, or may be, in all three places, one after another; and, upon my word, without bothering about the place where she was, or will be, I should go straight to La Flocelière, — that is to say, to the place where your idiot says she is to-day."

"You would make a poor blood-hound, my dear fellow," said the general. "The only exact information we have received is from the villain who gave us the cake, and whom you brought here —"

"And the others?"

"I would bet my general's epaulets against a sub-lieutenant's, that the others have been sent to us by some crafty fellow who saw M. le Maire talking with us, and was interested in putting us off the scent. To the hunt, then, my dear sub-prefect, and let us look after Souday, if we don't want to draw the cover blank."

"Bravo!" cried the sub-prefect. "I was afraid I had put my foot in it, but what you say reassures me."

"What have you done?"

"Why, I have this mayor's name; it is Courtin, and he is mayor of a little village called La Logerie."

"I know the place; we came very near taking Charette there, almost thirty-seven years ago."

"Well, this man described to me an individual who might serve us as a guide, and whom in any event it is prudent to arrest; so that he may not return to the château and give the alarm."

"And this individual?"

"Is the marquis's intendant, his keeper. Here's his description."

The general read from the paper handed him, as follows:—

"Short, grizzled hair, low forehead, bright black eyes, bristling eye-brows, nose adorned with a wart, and with hair in the nostrils, whiskers all around the face, round hat, velvet shooting-coat, waistcoat, and breeches, leather gaiters and belt. Special marks: he has with him a yellow pointer-dog, and his second incisor on the left side is broken."

"Good!" cried the general; "my oat-merchant, feature for feature! Master Terrien, whose name is no more Terrien, I dare swear, than mine is Barabbas."

"Well, general, you can satisfy yourself on that point directly."

"How so?"

"He will be here in a moment."

"Here?"

"To be sure."

"He is coming here?"

"He is coming."

"Of his own free will?"

"That, or by force."

"By force?"

"Yes; I have ordered his arrest, and it ought to be done by this time."

"Thousand devils!" cried the general, bringing his fist down so heavily upon the table that the magistrate leaped out of his chair. "Thousand devils!" he repeated; "what have you done?"

"Why, I should say, general, that if he's such a dangerous man as I was told he is, there was only one thing to do, — arrest him."

"Dangerous! dangerous! It is much more dangerous now than it would have been a quarter of an hour ago."

"But suppose he's arrested?"

"Oh, he won't be so quickly, believe me, that he won't have had time to give the alarm. The princesse will be warned before we are a league away from here. We shall be very lucky, too, if you have n't set this whole scoundrelly rabble by the ears, so that we shall not be able to take a man from the garrison."

"But there may yet be time," said the sub-prefect, rushing toward the door.

"Yes, hurry! Ah, thousand devils, it's too late!"

In fact, a dull grumbling was heard in the street at that moment, and grew louder from second to second, until it had attained the pitch of the terrible uproar made by unorganized multitudes on the eve of battle.

The general opened the window.

He espied, a hundred feet from the inn, a detachment of gendarmes, with Jean Oullier bound in their midst.

The mob was all about them, growling and threatening; the gendarmes were making very slow and difficult progress.

However, they had not yet used their weapons, but there was not a moment to lose.

"Well, the wine is drawn, and we must drink it," said the general, removing his redingote and hastily donning his uniform.

"Rusconi, my horse, my horse!" he called to his secretary. "Do you, Monsieur le Sous-préfet, try to get the National Guard together, if there are any; but let no gun be discharged without orders from me!"

A captain, sent by the secretary, entered the room.

"Get your men together in the courtyard, captain," continued the general. "Let my twenty chasseurs take saddle, two days' provisions and twenty-five cartridges to each man, and be ready to move the moment I give the signal."

The old general, in whom the fire of his youthful days seemed to be rekindled, went down into the courtyard and ordered the *porte-cochère* leading to the street to be opened.

"What!" cried the sub-prefect, "do you propose to show yourself alone to those madmen? You must not think of it, general."

"On the contrary, I think of nothing else. *Morbleu!* Must n't I get my men out of the scrape? Come, room there, room; this is no time for sentiment!"

As soon as both wings of the gate were thrown open, leaving the way clear for him, the general, urging his horse with two vicious digs of his spurs, found himself at the first bound in the middle of the street and the very thickest of the *melée*.

The sudden appearance of the tall, stern-faced old soldier in his brilliant uniform, trimmed with gold lace and covered with decorations, as well as the wonderful courage exhibited by him, had an electrical effect upon the crowd.

The outcries ceased as if by magic. The waving clubs were lowered; the peasants who were nearest the general touched their hats to him. The dense ranks opened, and the hero of Rivoli and the Pyramids suc-

ceeded in advancing twenty feet or more toward his gendarmes.

"Well, well, what's the matter, my *gars*?" he cried, in such penetrating tones that it was heard even in the alleys and by-ways.

"The matter is that they have arrested Jean Oullier," said a voice.

"And Jean Oullier is an honest man," said another voice.

"Criminals are the ones to be arrested, not honest folk," said a third.

"The result of which is that we won't allow Jean Oullier to be taken," chimed in a fourth.

"Silence!" shouted the general, so imperatively that no further remarks were volunteered.

"If Jean Oullier is a worthy, honest man," he continued, "which I do not doubt, Jean Oullier will be released. If he is one of those who seek to deceive you, and seduce you from your upright and loyal sentiments, Jean Oullier will be punished. Do you think that it would be unjust to punish those who seek to involve the country again in the fearful calamities of which the old men cannot speak to the children without weeping?"

"Jean Oullier is a peaceable man, and wishes no ill to any one," hazarded a voice.

"Pray, what do you lack?" continued the general, paying no heed to the interruption. "Your priests are respected; your religion is ours. Have we slain the king, as in 1793; or done away with God, as in 1794? Have we any designs on your property? No; it is under the protection of laws made for all alike. Your commerce has never been so flourishing."

"That's true," said a young peasant.

"Don't listen, then, to the unpatriotic Frenchmen

who, to satisfy their selfish passions, do not hesitate to bring upon the province all the horrors of civil war. Have you forgotten what they are, and must I recall them to you? Must I remind you of your old men, your mothers, wives, and children massacred, your crops trodden under foot, your cottages in flames, and death and disaster at every fireside?"

"It was the Blues who did it all!" cried a voice.

"No; it was not the Blues," retorted the general; "but those who incited you to that insane conflict,—insane then, but which would be impious to-day,—a conflict which did have a pretext at that time, but which has none to-day."

As he spoke, the general was urging his horse toward the gendarmes, who, on their side, were doing their best to reach the general.

This became somewhat more practicable, as his soldierly talk made an evident impression upon some of the peasants. Some hung their heads and said nothing; while others made remarks to their neighbors, which seemed, from the air with which they were made, to approve what he said.

But the nearer the general came to the gendarmes and their prisoner, the less favorably disposed were the faces which surrounded him. The nearest were decidedly threatening, and those who owned these faces were evidently troop-leaders and parish-captains.

With them it was useless for him to waste his eloquence. Their minds were made up not to listen, and to prevent the others from listening.

They roared rather than shouted.

The general understood the situation of affairs, and resolved to awe these men by one of those vigorous strokes which are so effective with mobs.

Aubin Courte-Joie was in the front rank of the disaffected.

This seems strange, considering his infirmity, with which we are acquainted.

But Aubin Courte-Joie had temporarily substituted for his two wretched wooden legs two solid legs of flesh and bone. He was using a beggar of enormous stature as a horse.

He was seated astraddle the shoulders of the beggar, who, by means of the straps upon the inn-keeper's apocryphal legs, held him in that position as firmly as the general was seated in his saddle.

Thus mounted, Aubin was on a level with the general's epaulets, and assailed him with frantic cries and threatening gestures.

The general stretched out his hand, seized him by the coat-collar, lifted him up by main strength, held him over the heads of the crowd for a short time, and then tossed him to a gendarme.

"Tie up this clown," he said, "he will end by making me ill."

The beggar, freed from his rider's weight, raised his head, and the general recognized the idiot with whom he had talked in the morning; but at this time the idiot's face wore an expression as clever as anybody's.

The general's feat aroused the hilarity of the mob, but it did not last long.

Aubin Courte-Joie found himself in the grasp of the gendarme, at whose left was Jean Oullier.

He quietly took his knife from his pocket, opened it, and plunged it up to the hilt in the gendarme's breast, crying:—

"*Vive Henri V.!* Save yourself, Oullier, my boy!"

At the same moment the beggar, who, with a worthy

spirit of emulation, determined no doubt to cap the general's athletic feat, glided under his horse, and by a sudden and vigorous movement, seized the general by the foot, and threw him off on the other side.

The general and the gendarme fell at the same time; it was natural to think they were both killed, but the general at once sprang to his feet, and vaulted into the saddle with marvellous agility and address.

As he resumed his seat he struck the beggar so fierce a blow with his fist upon his bare head, that he fell without a sound as if his skull were fractured.

Neither the gendarme nor the beggar moved; the latter was stunned, but the gendarme was dead.

Jean Oullier, for his part, although his hands were tied gave the second gendarme a sudden push with his shoulder, and nearly overthrew him. He then jumped across the body of the dead soldier and plunged into the crowd.

But the general's eye was everywhere, even upon what was going on behind him.

He drove the spurs into his horse, who turned quickly around and leaped into the middle of the howling rabble; then he seized Jean Oullier, as he had seized Courte-Joie, and laid him across the horse in front of him.

Then stones began to fall like rain, and the clubs to resume their offensive position.

The gendarmes stood firm; they surrounded the general, placing him in the centre of a circle, and presenting their bayonets to the mob, who did not dare to attack them man to man, but contented themselves with attacking them with projectiles.

They advanced to within twenty feet of the inn.

At this point the situation of the general and his men became critical.

The peasants who seemed determined not to leave Jean Oullier in the power of his enemies, became more and more boldly aggressive.

Already some bayonets were tinged with blood, and yet the ardor of the rebels seemed to increase.

Fortunately the general's voice could easily reach the soldiers where they were stationed.

"Help, grenadiers of the Thirty-second!" he cried.

On the instant, the inn-gates flew open, the soldiers rushed out with bayonets fixed, and drove back the peasants; and the general and his escort were able to enter the courtyard.

There he found the sub-prefect awaiting him.

"There's your man," he said, throwing Jean Oullier at him, like a parcel; "he has cost us dear. God grant that he be worth the price!"

At this moment a well-sustained firing was heard at the farther end of the square.

"What's that?" exclaimed the general, pricking up his ears, and dilating his nostrils.

"The National Guard, doubtless," replied the sub-prefect, "whom I ordered to assemble, and who are now driving the blackguards back, according to my instructions."

"Who gave the order to fire?"

"I did, general; it was necessary to rescue you."

"Thousand devils, you see that I rescued myself!" said the old soldier.

"Monsieur," he added, shaking his head, "pray remember this: in civil war every drop of blood unnecessarily shed is worse than a crime, it's a mistake."

An orderly galloped into the courtyard.

"General," said he, "the insurgents are fleeing in all directions. The chasseurs have come up; are they to pursue them?"

"Let not a man stir!" said the general. "Leave it to the National Guard. They are their friends, and will arrange matters among themselves."

A second volley announced that the peasants and National Guards were in the act of arranging matters.

These were the reports which Baron Michel heard at La Logerie.

"Ah!" said the general, "now it remains for us simply to get what good we can out of this sad affair."

"We have only one chance," he said, pointing to Jean Oullier, "and it is that this man alone was in the secret. Has he communicated with any one since you arrested him, gendarmes?"

"No, my general, not even by signs, for his hands were bound."

"Have n't you noticed him nod his head, or say a single word? You know with these rascals a nod is enough; one word tells the whole story."

"No, my general."

"Well, then, we'll take our chances. Give your men their supper, captain; in a quarter of an hour we will start. The gendarmes and National Guard will be enough to guard the town. I will take my twenty chasseurs to keep the road clear."

The general entered the inn while the soldiers were making their preparations for departure.

Meanwhile Jean Oullier was sitting on a rock in the middle of the courtyard, watched by two gendarmes.

His face maintained its usual impassibility; with his bound hands he was patting his dog, which had followed him, and with his head on his master's knee from time to time licked the hand which caressed him, as if to remind the prisoner that in his misfortune he had still one faithful friend.

Jean Oullier patted him gently, and stroked him with the feather of a wild duck which he had picked up in the courtyard; taking advantage of a moment when his two guardians were looking away, he slipped the feather between the animal's teeth, made a gesture of command, and rose to his feet, saying in a low tone: —

“Home, Pataud!”

The dog moved quietly away, looking at his master from time to time, until he reached the gate, which he passed through without attracting notice and disappeared.

“Good!” said Jean Oullier, “there goes somebody who will arrive before we do.”

Unfortunately the gendarmes were not alone in watching the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXI.

JEAN OULLIER'S RESOURCES.

At this day there are but very few good broad roads in all La Vendée, and the few that there are, have all been built since 1832, — that is to say since the occurrence of the events we have undertaken to describe. Indeed the absence of great arteries of communication was the principal source of the strength of the insurgents in the great war.

Let us say a word or two of those which did exist in 1832, confining our attention exclusively to those on the left bank of the Loire.

They were two in number.

The first ran from Nantes to La Rochelle by Montaigu; the second from Nantes to Paimbœuf by Le Pèlerin, following the windings of the river almost the entire distance.

Beside these main highways of the first rank, there were several wretched secondary or transverse roads: from Nantes to Beaupréau by Vallet, Nantes to Mortagne, Chollet, and Bressuire by Clisson, Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne by Légé, and Nantes to Challans by Machecoul.

To reach Machecoul from Montaigu by following these roads, it was absolutely necessary to make a considerable *détour*; in fact they would have to go to Légé, there take the road from Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne, follow it to its intersection with the Challans road, and thence to Machecoul.

The general was too well aware that the success of his venture depended altogether upon the rapidity with which it was carried out, to submit to so long a journey as that. Furthermore these roads were no more favorable to military operations than the cross-paths.

Bordered with deep, wide ditches, with bushes and trees, and shut in by hedge-crowned slopes, they offered most excellent opportunities for ambuscade throughout their whole length.

The advantage to be gained by making use of them in no way compensated for the drawbacks, so the general decided to take the cross-path to Machecoul by Vieille-Vigne, which cut off nearly a league and a half.

The system of cantonments adopted by him had had the result of familiarizing the soldiers with the country, and giving them accurate knowledge of all the obscure paths.

As far as the river Boulogne the captain in command of the detachment of infantry knew the road because he had been over it by day; when they reached that point, as it was evident that Jean Oullier would refuse to show them the road, they expected to find a guide sent by Courtin, who did not dare to let his connection with the expedition appear openly.

When he made up his mind to take the cross-road, the general took abundant precaution against surprise.

Two chasseurs, pistol in hand, rode ahead, to keep the way clear for the column, which was flanked by a dozen men on each side, whose duty it was to beat the thickets and underbrush by which the road was hemmed in and in spots encroached upon.

The general rode at the head of his little band, in the centre of which he had placed Jean Oullier.

The old Vendean, with his wrists tied together, was seated behind a chasseur; a thong had been passed

around his body, and for greater security fastened around the chest of the horseman, so that Jean could not escape even if he should succeed in ridding himself of the cords around his wrists.

Two other chasseurs rode on either side of him, and were specially instructed to watch him.

It was shortly after six in the evening when they left Montaigu; they had five leagues to do, which would bring them to the Château de Souday about eleven o'clock, if they could make a league an hour.

That seemed to the general a very suitable hour to execute his *coup-de-main*.

If Courtin's report was accurate, if his presumptions were well founded, the leaders of the Vendean uprising were even then assembled at Souday to confer with the princesse, and it was possible that they would not have separated when he reached the château. In that case there was no reason why he should not take them all in one cast of the net.

After half-an-hour's march, when they were half a league from Montaigu, and as the little column was passing the cross-road of Saint Corentin, they saw an old woman in rags on her knees before an image, praying.

At the noise made by the troop, she turned her head and, apparently from curiosity, rose and stood on the edge of the road to watch them pass; then, as if the sight of the general's glittering uniform suggested the idea to her, she mumbled one of the prayers regularly used by beggars when asking alms.

Officers and soldiers, intent upon other things, and becoming more grave in proportion as the light faded, passed on without noticing the beldam.

"Did n't your general see that poor soul asking for bread?" Jean Oullier asked the chasseur on his right.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because he did n't open his purse. Let him beware; he who thrusts aside the open palm may dread the closed hand. We shall have bad luck."

"If you choose to take your prediction home to yourself, my good fellow, I think you may safely do so without fear of going astray, for it seems to me that you are in greater danger than any of us."

"True; so I would like to avert it."

"How so?"

"Feel in my pocket and get a piece of money."

"What for?"

"To give to that woman; then she will divide her prayers, half for me who bestow the alms, and half for you who help me to do it."

The chasseur shrugged his shoulders; but superstition is strangely contagious, and this is more true of that connected with alms-giving than of any other variety.

The soldier, although he claimed to be superior to such folly, thought he ought not to refuse Jean Oullier the service he requested, and which might cause Heaven's blessing to descend upon them both.

At that moment the troop was executing a right wheel into the cross-road leading to Vieille-Vigne; the general halted, and watched the men march past, to make sure that his orders were strictly followed. He noticed Jean talking with his neighbor, and saw the soldier's movement.

"Why do you allow the prisoner to communicate with bystanders?" he demanded of the chasseur, who told him what had taken place.

"Halt!" shouted the general; "arrest that woman and search her."

His order was obeyed on the instant; but they found

nothing on her except a few pieces of money, which the general examined, however, with great care.

But he turned them over and over to no purpose,—he could find nothing suspicious about them.

Nevertheless he put the money in his pocket, giving the old woman a five-franc piece in exchange.

Jean Oullier observed the general's act with a sneering smile.

"Oh, well," said he, in a low tone, yet so distinctly that the beggar did not lose one of his words, "the trifling alms of the *prisoner*," he emphasized the word, "would have brought you good luck, mother; so much the more reason why you should not forget him in your prayers. A dozen Aves in his behalf may greatly help a poor devil to obtain salvation."

Jean raised his voice at the last phrase.

"My good fellow," the general said to him when the column resumed its march, "after this you must apply to me when you are charitably inclined; I will commend you to the prayers of those whom you wish to help; my intercession will do you no harm up above, and it may save you a vast amount of discomfort here below. And you," the general continued sternly, addressing the horsemen, "remember my orders in future, or something will happen to you, I promise you."

At Vieille-Vigne a halt was made to allow the foot-soldiers a quarter of an hour's rest.

The Vendean was placed in the centre of the square, so as to keep him at a distance from the inhabitants who thronged to the spot, and crowded curiously around the troops.

The horse which carried Jean Oullier had lost a shoe, and was tired out with the double weight; the general selected the strongest-looking beast among the escort.

He belonged to one of the horsemen of the advance-guard, who, notwithstanding the dangers attending that post, seemed extremely reluctant to assume that vacated by his comrade.

He was a stocky, sturdy little fellow, with a pleasant, intellectual face, and entirely without the swagger affected by his companions.

While this substitution was being arranged, a lantern was brought—it was by this time quite dark—to enable an inspection of the cords and thongs to be made, and by its light Jean Oullier could see the features of the man with whom he was to make the journey; his eyes met those of the soldier, and he observed that the latter blushed as he looked at him.

They resumed their march with redoubled precautions; for the farther they got, the more dense the woods became, and consequently the more favorable for a surprise.

The prospect of imminent danger, the wearisome nature of the march over roads which were for the most part nought but ravines strown with huge rocks, had no effect upon the good spirits of the soldiers, who began to laugh at danger; they had been silent for a while at nightfall, but when night was fairly upon them they began to talk again with that careless gayety which, among Frenchmen, may disappear for a moment, but always comes back.

The chasseur whose mount was shared with Jean Oullier, alone remained strangely glum and thoughtful.

"*Sacre dié!* Thomas," said the horseman at his right, "you are never very lively; but to-day, upon my word, you act as if you were riding down the devil."

"*Dame!*" said the man on the left, "if he isn't riding down the devil, he has him up behind."

"But just imagine, Thomas, that it's a girl you've got there, instead of a man, and pinch her cheeks."

"The villain ought to know how that is done, for it's the custom of the country to ride with a girl, who hugs you from behind."

"True," said the first speaker, "do you know that you're half Chouan, Thomas?"

"Say rather that he's a Chouan out and out! Does n't he go to Mass every Sunday?"

The horseman at whom these shafts of satire were aimed had no time to reply; the general's voice ordered them to break ranks, and proceed in single file, the path having become so narrow, and the sloping sides so close together, that it was impossible for two horses to walk abreast.

During the momentary confusion caused by this evolution, Jean Oullier began to whistle softly the first bars of the Breton air, the words of which run thus,—

"Les Chouans sont des hommes de bien."

At the very first note the horseman could not restrain a sudden movement. Thereupon, as one of the two chasseurs was behind and the other in front under the new formation, Jean Oullier, in a measure free from their surveillance, put his lips close to the ear of his silent companion.

"Ah, it's of no use for you to keep silent," said he; "I knew you at first sight, Thomas Tinguy, just as you knew me."

The soldier sighed, and moved his shoulders in a way to signify that he was acting against his will; but he made no reply in words.

"Thomas Tinguy," Jean continued, "do you know where you are going? Do you know where you are

taking your father's old friend? To pillage and destroy the Château de Souday, whose masters have been for all time benefactors of your family."

Thomas Tinguy sighed more deeply than before.

"Your father is dead!" said Jean.

Thomas made no reply, but shivered in his saddle; only the one syllable issued from his lips audible to Jean Oullier alone: "Dead?"

"Yes, dead!" whispered the huntsman. "And who was watching with your sister Rosine by his bedside when the old man breathed his last? The two young Demoiselles de Souday, whom you know well, — Mademoiselle Bertha and Mademoiselle Mary; and that, too, at the risk of their lives, for your father died of a malignant fever. Although they could not prolong his existence, like the angels they are, they sweetened his dying agony. Where is your sister now? — she who had no place to lay her head. At the Château de Souday. Ah, Thomas Tinguy, I would rather be poor Jean Oullier, shot down in a corner, than the man who carries him bound to the stake!"

"Hush, Jean, hush!" said Tinguy, in a voice broken with sobs. "We are not there yet; we will see."

While this was taking place between Oullier and Tinguy's son, the ravine through which they were marching had sloped suddenly downward toward one of the fords of the Boulogne.

Night had fallen, dark and impenetrable, with not a star in the sky; and the darkness, although in one view it was favorable for the purposes of the expedition, might well become, in that unfamiliar, wild region, a source of dire peril.

When they reached the river-bank, they found the two chasseurs of the advance guard waiting, pistol in hand.

They had halted, and were looking anxiously around.

Instead of a clear, limpid stream, running noisily over the pebbles, such as one ordinarily finds in fordable spots, they saw before them a smooth expanse of black water, gently lapping the face of the rocky embankments which border the Boulogne.

They looked in vain in all directions for the guide promised by Courtin.

The general shouted.

"*Qui vive?*" some one answered on the other bank.

"Souday!" said the general.

"You are the ones I am waiting for," cried the voice.

"Are we at the ford of the Boulogne?" the general asked.

"Yes."

"What makes the water so high?"

"There's a great freshet on account of the recent rains."

"Is the passage practicable, notwithstanding the freshet?"

"*Dame!* I never saw the river so high, and I think it would be more prudent —"

The guide's voice stopped abruptly and a deep groan took its place.

Then there was the noise of a struggle, as if several men were pulling one another over loose stones.

"Thousand devils!" cried the general; "they are murdering our guide!"

A cry of anguish answered and confirmed the exclamation.

"One grenadier to horse behind every horseman!" shouted the general. "The captain behind me! The two lieutenants remain here with the rest of the squad,

the prisoner and the three horsemen who are guarding him! Forward, at double quick!"

In an instant every chasseur had a grenadier behind him.

Eighty grenadiers and the two lieutenants, the prisoner and the three chasseurs, including Tinguy, were left upon the right bank of the Boulogne.

The order was executed with the swiftness of thought, and the general, followed by the seventeen chasseurs, doubled up with as many grenadiers, rode into the river.

Twenty feet from the bank the horses lost their footing; but they swam a few strokes, and reached the opposite bank without mishap.

The foot-soldiers were on the ground almost before they reached the shore.

"Do you see nothing?" said the general, trying to pierce the dense obscurity which enveloped his little troop.

"No, my general," the soldiers replied, as with one voice.

"Nevertheless, it was from just this spot," said the general, as if speaking to himself, "that the brave man answered us. Beat the bushes, but without losing sight of one another; perhaps you will find his body."

The soldiers did as they were told, covering the ground thoroughly within a radius of fifty metres. But they came back in fifteen minutes, having discovered nothing, and much disconcerted at the sudden disappearance of their guide.

"Did you find anything?" the general asked.

A single grenadier came forward with a cotton night-cap in his hand.

"I found this night-cap," he said.

"Where?"

"Caught on the thorns of a bush."

"It's our guide's night-cap," the general said.

"How do you know?" queried the captain.

"Because," was the unhesitating reply, "the men who attacked him wore hats."

The captain said nothing, not daring to ask any more questions; but it was evident that the general's reply had enlightened him but little.

Dermoncourt understood his silence, and volunteered a more detailed explanation.

"It's very simple," said he. "The men who murdered our guide have very clearly been following us ever since we left Montaigu, with the purpose of rescuing our prisoner. It seems that the capture is more important than I supposed. These men who followed us must have been at the fair, and were undoubtedly wearing hats, as they were in the town; while, on the other hand, the guide, called suddenly from his bed, aroused by the man who sent him here to us, probably seized the first head-gear that came under his hand, or, even more probably, kept on what he had on in bed. Hence, the night-cap."

"So you think, general," said the captain, "that the Chouans have ventured so near our column?"

"They have been on our flank ever since we left Montaigu, and have n't lost sight of us a single instant. *Mordieu!* people are always complaining of the inhumanity with which wars of this sort are conducted, and yet one never fails to find that one has not been inhuman enough. Fool that I am!"

"I understand you less and less, general," said the captain, laughing.

"You remember that beggar-woman who accosted us just out of Montaigu?"

"Yes, general."

"Well, it's that harridan who set this party on us. I set out to send her back to the town, and I did wrong not to follow my impulse; I should have saved this poor devil's life. Ah, now I see what it is! We have just heard the echoes of the Aves being chanted for the salvation of our prisoner."

"Do you think they will dare to attack us?"

"If they were in force, they would have done it before this; but there are only five or six of them at most."

"Shall I bring over the men on the other bank, general?"

"Wait! Our horses lost their footing, and our foot-soldiers would drown. There must be another more practicable ford in the neighborhood."

"You think so, general?"

"I am sure of it."

"Do you know the river?"

"Not the least in the world."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Ah, captain, it's easy to see that you didn't serve, as I did, in the great war,—that war of wild beasts, in which we had to proceed by induction. These fellows were not in ambush on this bank when we reached the other, that's clear."

"Clear to your mind, general."

"*Mon Dieu!* clear to everybody's mind. If they had been on this bank, they would have heard our guide's steps, for he was coming along unsuspecting; and they would not have awaited our arrival to seize him or kill him. Therefore this band must have been marching on our flank, flanking our flankers."

"It certainly seems probable, general."

"They must have reached the Boulogne only an

instant ahead of us. Now, the interval between our arrival and halt and the attack on our man was too short for them to have gone a long way around in search of a passage."

"Why could n't they have crossed where we did?"

"Because most of the peasants, especially in the heart of the province, don't know how to swim. So this other passage must be quite near here. Let four men follow down the river, and four go up five hundred feet. Off with you, quickly! We don't want to be shot down here. Besides, we're all wet through!"

In ten minutes the officer returned.

"You were perfectly right, general," he said. "Three hundred feet up river there is a little island in mid-stream, with a tree stretched from it to each bank."

"Bravo!" said the general; "the rest of our party will be able to cross without dampening a cartridge."

"Ho, there, lieutenant!" he shouted across to the other bank; "march up the river till you come to a tree thrown across, and keep strict watch on the prisoner!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"FETCH, PATAUD! FETCH!"

FOR about five minutes the two little bands ascended the opposite sides of the stream.

At last the general, on reaching the spot pointed out by the captain, called a halt.

"One lieutenant and forty men, forward!" he shouted.

Forty men and a lieutenant marched down to the river and crossed, wading in the water up to their necks, but able to hold their guns and cartridges over their heads and keep them dry.

They approached, and formed in order of battle.

"Now," said the general, "bring the prisoner across."

Thomas Tinguy rode into the water with a chasseur at each side.

"Verily, Thomas," said Jean Oullier, in low but penetrating tones, "if I were in your place, I should fear that my father's ghost would rise up to reproach me for having hesitated a moment between the blood of his best friend and a wretched strap, which you have only to cut."

The chasseur passed his hand across his brow, on which the perspiration stood in beads, and made the sign of the cross.

At this moment the three horsemen had reached the middle of the stream, but the current had separated them a little.

Suddenly a great noise, accompanied by the splashing of water, proved that Jean Oullier had not evoked in

vain before the poor Breton soldier the revered image of him to whom he owed his existence.

The general was not deceived for a second as to the cause of the uproar.

"The prisoner is escaping!" he cried, in a voice of thunder. "Light torches and scatter along the bank, and fire on him if he shows himself! As for you," he added, turning to Thomas, who had stepped ashore two feet from him without making the slightest attempt to fly, "as for you, your hour has come!"

Drawing a pistol from his holster, he cried, —

"Thus die all traitors!"

And fired.

Tinguy received the ball full in the breast, and fell to the ground stone dead.

The soldiers, obeying the general's orders with an alacrity which was most significant of their appreciation of the plight they were in, rushed along the river bank, following the course of the current.

Half a score of torches, upon either bank, cast a lurid light upon the waters.

Jean Oullier, relieved from his principal embarrassment as soon as Thomas Tinguy had cut the thong which held him, slipped off the horse and dove beneath the surface, passing between the legs of the horse at his right.

But it will be asked, how did he make out to swim with his hands tied?

He had counted so confidently upon the favorable effect of his eloquence upon his old comrade's son that, after it became dark, he had employed all the time not occupied in persuading Thomas in gnawing the cord with which his wrists were tied.

Jean Oullier had good teeth; so that when he reached

the Boulogne, the cord was holding only by a thread, and once in the water, only a very slight effort was necessary to get rid of it altogether.

After a few seconds he felt the need of taking breath, and was compelled to rise to the surface. But the moment he did so, ten reports rang out from all sides, and as many bullets splashed up the water around the swimmer.

By a miracle, not one struck him; but he felt the hissing breath of the missiles upon his face.

Down he went again; and as he found the bottom with his feet, instead of keeping on down the river, he started up, essaying what in hunting parlance is called a *hourvari*.

Why should he not be successful in a trick which the hare or the fox or the wolf could work successfully on him when he was hunting them?

Jean executed a *hourvari*, then, and ascended the stream, holding his breath until he nearly burst, and coming to the top only at points not in the lines of light cast by the torches.

The manœuvre did, in fact, throw his pursuers off the scent.

Not imagining that he would make the task he had undertaken any more difficult by setting himself against the strong current, the soldiers kept on down the river, holding their guns like hunters watching for game, and ready to fire the instant it comes in sight.

Because the game was a man, the watching was only the more earnest and eager.

Only a half-dozen of grenadiers were watching the banks of the stream higher up, and they had but a single torch.

Stifling his stertorous breathing as much as possible,

Jean Oullier succeeded in reaching a willow whose branches hung out over the river with their ends dangling in the water.

The swimmer seized one of these branches and put it between his teeth, and held himself up by it, with his head thrown back, so that only his mouth and nose were above the surface.

He was just recovering his breath when he heard a plaintive howling at the spot where the column had halted and he had taken to the water.

He recognized the voice of his own dog.

"Pataud!" he muttered, "Pataud here? Pataud, whom I sent home to Souday! Something must have happened to him that he didn't get there. Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" he added, with intense fervor and supreme faith; "now, indeed, it is necessary that these villains should not get their hands on me again!"

The soldiers, who had seen the dog in the courtyard of the inn, also recognized him.

"There's his dog! there's his dog!" they cried.

"Bravo!" said a sergeant; "the dog will help us to find the master."

He tried to put his hand upon Pataud; but, although the poor beast seemed dull and heavy, he eluded his grasp, and having sniffed the air up stream, leaped into the water.

"This way, comrades, this way!" cried the sergeant to the men who were exploring the banks, pointing in the direction the dog had taken. "We can find the other dog by following him. Well done, Pataud! well done!"

Jean Oullier had put his head out of water at all risks, as soon as he heard and recognized Pataud's cry.

He saw the dog swimming diagonally across the river,

straight toward him, and he knew that he was lost unless he adopted a desperate course,—for, in Jean Oullier's eyes, it was a desperate course to sacrifice his dog.

If nought but his own life had been at stake, he would have lost it or saved it with his dog,—at least he would have hesitated to save himself at Pataud's expense.

He gently unfastened the goat-skin cloak, which he wore over his waistcoat, and dropped it into the water with a slight push toward the current.

Pataud was only five or six feet from him.

"Seek, boy! fetch!" said Jean softly, pointing in the direction he was to take.

The dog, however, hesitated to obey, feeling, doubtless, that his strength was giving out.

"Fetch, Pataud! fetch!" said Jean, in a more imperative tone.

Pataud swam off in the direction of the garment, which was already some twenty feet away.

Seeing that his ruse was successful, Jean took in a new store of air and plunged in again, just as the soldiers reached the foot of the great willow.

One of them climbed quickly out upon the tree and, holding the torch at arm's length, lighted up the stream for some distance.

Then they saw Pataud swimming along after the cloak, groaning and whining as if he were deploring his inability, with his vanishing strength, to carry out his master's orders.

The soldiers, who were following his movements, hurried down stream again, away from Jean Oullier, until one of them spied the cloak itself floating on the water.

"This way, my friends!" he cried; "here he is! here he is! the brigand!"

As he blazed away at the cloak, grenadiers and chasseurs rushed in a crowd along both banks, receding more and more from the spot where Jean Oullier had taken shelter, and riddling with their bullets the piece of goat-skin, toward which Pataud was swimming desperately.

For a few minutes the fire was so sustained that there was no need of torches. The flashes of burning powder from the guns illuminated the wild ravine through which flows the Boulogne; and the cliffs, echoing and re-echoing the reports, increased many fold the roar of the fusillade.

The general was the first to detect the error of the men.

"Stop firing!" he said to the captain, who was walking at his side. "These idiots have let the prey go by pursuing the shadow!"

At that moment there was a flash on the crest of a rock near the river. A sharp, hissing sound passed over the head of the two officers, and a bullet buried itself in the trunk of a tree not two feet away from them.

"Aha!" said the general, with perfect coolness, "our villain only asked for a dozen Aves; his friends seem to be doing things on a larger scale."

In fact, three or four more reports were heard, and the bullets ploughed their way into the ground.

"Trumpets, sound the rally!" cried the general, in a voice heard above all the uproar. "Put out the torches there!"

"Bring over the forty men from the other bank," he said in an undertone to the captain. "It looks as if we might soon need our whole force."

In an instant the soldiers, alarmed by this night attack, were formed about their leader.

Five or six flashes from different points on the sides of the ravine lighted up the inky sky. A grenadier fell dead and a chasseur's horse reared and fell upon his rider, shot in the chest.

"Forward! thousand devils!" cried the general, "and see if these night-birds will dare to wait for us!"

Taking his place at the head of his soldiers, he began to clamber up the side of the ravine with such impetuosity that, notwithstanding the darkness which made the ascent doubly difficult, and the bullets which fell among the soldiers and wounded two of them, the little troop was at the top in less time than it takes to tell it.

The hostile fire ceased then, as if by enchantment; and if a few furze-bushes, which were still waving, had not borne witness to the recent presence of the Chouans, one would have thought there were none within a thousand miles.

"Sad war! sad war!" muttered the general. "And now our expedition must necessarily prove abortive. No matter, we will try it! Besides, Souday is on the road to Machecoul, and we must go to Machecoul to give our men a chance to rest."

"But how about a guide, general?" queried the captain.

"A guide? Do you see that light about five hundred feet from here?"

"A light?"

"Yes; over there."

"No, my general."

"Well, I see it. That light means a cabin. A cabin means a peasant; and the inhabitant of that cabin —

man, woman, or child — must show us the way through the forest."

In a tone which augured ill for the inmate of the cabin, whoever it might prove to be, the general gave the word to march, after taking the precaution to throw out flanking parties as far as the safety of his men permitted.

The general, followed by his little troop, was just leaving the ridge when a man emerged from the water, stopped for a moment behind the trunk of a willow to listen, and then glided along the bushes with the evident intention of pursuing the same route that the soldiers had taken.

As he was grasping a tuft of heather to pull himself up the embankment, he heard a feeble groaning a few steps away.

Jean Oullier—for this man was no other than our fugitive—approached the place whence the groan seemed to come. As he approached, the sounds became more and more pitiful.

He stooped and held out his hand, which was at once licked by a soft, hot tongue.

"Pataud! my poor Pataud!" muttered the Vendean.

It was, indeed, Pataud, who, with the last remnant of his strength, had brought his master's goat-skin ashore and lain down upon it to die.

Jean drew away his garment from under the dog and called him by name. Pataud gave a deep groan, but did not stir.

Jean then took him in his arms to carry him away; but he made not the slightest movement, and the hand with which the Vendean was holding him was moistened with a thick, warm fluid. He put the hand to his face, and detected the faint odor of blood.

He tried to pry the dog's teeth apart, but could not do it.

Pataud had died saving his master, whom chance had brought to the spot to receive his last caress.

But the question remained, Had he been killed by one of the bullets fired by the soldiers, or was he already wounded when he took to the water to join his master?

The Vendean was inclined to the last belief. His hesitation on the bank, and the weakness with which he swam, all tended to make Jean believe in the theory of a prior wound.

"Well," he said, "it will be light again to-morrow, and woe to him who slew you, my poor dog!"

With these words he laid Pataud's body in a bunch of willow shoots, darted up the hill, and was lost to sight among the furze-bushes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PROPRIETOR OF THE CABIN.

THE cabin, in whose window the general had seen the light twinkling, and to which he had called the captain's attention, was occupied by two families.

These two families had for their heads two brothers, Joseph and Pascal Picaut.

Their father, in 1792, had taken part in the first riotous gatherings in the Retz country; he had attached himself to the bloodthirsty Souchu as the pilot-fish attaches itself to the shark, or the jackal to the lion, and had done his part toward the frightful massacres which signalized the beginning of the insurrection on the left bank of the Loire.

When Charette gave this Carrier with the white cockade his just deserts, Picaut, whose appetite for blood had been fully developed, sulked under the new leader, who, in his eyes, was guilty of a serious mistake in not thirsting for blood except upon the battle-field, left his division for that which was commanded by the terrible Jolly, the old surgeon of Machecoul; he, at least, fully came up to Picaut's exalted standard.

But Jolly, recognizing the necessity of unity of purpose, and foreseeing the military genius which the leader from lower La Vendée was to develop, placed himself under his orders; and Picaut, who had not been consulted, relieved himself from the necessity of consulting his commanding officer by abandoning his comrades once more.

Wearied by these constant changes, and thoroughly convinced that time would never lessen his hatred for Souchu's murderers, he sought a general who would not be fascinated by Charette's exploits, and could find nobody better than Stofflet, whose dislike for the hero of the Retz country had been displayed many a time.

On the 25th February, 1796, Stofflet was taken prisoner at the farm of La Poitevinière, with two aides-de-camp and two chasseurs who were with him.

They shot the Vendean chief and his two officers, and sent the two peasants home.

It was two years since Picaut, who was one of the two, had seen his house.

When he reached it he found upon the stoop two tall young folks, strong and well-formed, who leaped upon his neck and kissed him.

They were his sons, one seventeen, the other sixteen years of age.

Picaut submitted to their caresses with good grace; when they had made an end of them, he began to scrutinize their athletic forms, and feel their muscular limbs with evident satisfaction.

He had left two children at home: he found there two soldiers; but like himself, they were absolutely without weapons. The Republic had taken away the carbine and sabre which Picaut owed to English munificence.

Now Picaut determined that the Republic should give them back to him, and should even be generous enough to arm his two sons, by way of compensation for the injury it had done him. He had no idea, however, of consulting the Republic upon the subject.

Consequently, the next day he ordered the young men to take their wild apple-tree sticks, and he set out with them toward Torfou, where a demi-brigade of infantry was stationed.

When Picaut, who travelled at night, and across the open fields, disdaining the rough paths, espied at a distance of half a league, a collection of lights which indicated that the town was near, and that he was at the end of his journey, he told his two sons to continue to follow him, but to copy all his movements, and to stop short wherever they might be when they heard the twitter of the blackbird, suddenly startled.

There is no hunter who does not know that the blackbird, when suddenly startled, utters as it flies away a little cry, repeated rapidly three or four times, which is absolutely peculiar to him.

Thereupon, instead of marching straight ahead, as he had done before, Picaut began to crouch and crawl, always in the shadow of the hedges, making the circuit of the town, and listening with the greatest attention every twenty feet or so.

At last he heard a slow, measured, monotonous footstep,—the step of a man walking by himself.

Picaut lay flat upon his stomach, and kept on in the direction of the step, working himself along with his elbows and his knees.

His sons did as he did.

At the end of the field which he was following the edge of, Picaut parted the hedge and looked through; and being apparently satisfied with what he saw, he made a hole, put his head through, and glided after it like an adder, without paying much heed to the thorns which his body encountered on the way.

Having reached the other side, he imitated the cry of a frightened blackbird, which was, as we have said, the signal agreed upon with his sons.

They stopped as ordered, but stood up, and watched their father's manœuvring over the top of the hedge.

The field on the other side, which Picaut had entered, was a meadow, with a thick growth of tall grass, which waved gently beneath the wind. At the other side of the meadow, perhaps fifty feet away, they could make out the road.

Upon this road a sentinel was walking up and down a hundred feet from a house used as a guard-house, at the door of which another sentinel was stationed.

The two young men took this all in at a glance, then fixed their eyes again upon their father, who was still creeping along in the grass toward the sentinel.

When Picaut was within two feet of the road he stopped behind a bush. The soldier was walking back and forth, and every time that he turned his back to the town his clothing or his weapons brushed against the bush, and every time the young folks trembled for their father.

Suddenly, just as a fresh breeze was springing up it bore down to them a stifled cry; and with the keenness of vision common to those who are accustomed to using their eyes at night, they saw, on the white expanse of the road, a black, struggling mass.

It was composed of Picaut and the sentinel, whom Picaut, after stabbing, had finished by strangling.

An instant later the Vendean returned to his sons, and shared with them the sentinel's gun, sabre, and haversack, as the wolf shares her booty with her young ones.

With this gun, sabre, and haversack well stocked with cartridges, a second equipment was easier to procure than the first, and a third than the second.

But it was not enough for Picaut to have the arms; he must find also a chance to use them. He looked about him, and in MM. d'Autichamp, de Scepeaux, de Puisaye, and de Bourmont, who were still in the

field, he saw only rose-water Royalists, who did not make war at all to his liking, and no one of whom resembled within a thousand miles Souchu, who still exemplified the type of leader desired by Picaut.

The result was that rather than be ill commanded, Picaut resolved to make a leader of himself, and command others.

He recruited a few dissatisfied spirits like himself, and became the leader of a band, which, although small in numbers, never lost a chance to demonstrate its hatred for the Republic.

Picaut's tactics were very simple.

He ordinarily dwelt in the forests, and allowed his men to rest during the day.

When night came, he left the woods which sheltered him, and stationed his little troop in ambush along the hedges; then if a convoy or a diligence passed that way, he would attack it, and carry off whatever was valuable; when convoys were scarce, or diligences too well guarded, Picaut took his revenge by shooting down outposts or burning the farms of patriots:

After one or two expeditions, his companions gave Picaut the nickname of "No Quarter," and he evinced his determination to earn the title in good conscience, by never failing after it was bestowed upon him to hang, shoot, or disembowel all Republicans, male or female, citizens or soldiers, old men or children, who fell into his hands.

He continued his operations up to 1800; but at that time, as Europe gave the First Consul a little breathing space,—or the First Consul gave it to Europe, as you choose,—Bonaparte, who had doubtless heard of the exploits of Picaut "No Quarter," resolved to devote a little leisure to him, and despatched against him, not

an army-corps, but two Chouans, recruited in Rue de Jerusalem, and two brigades of gendarmerie.

Picaut unsuspectingly welcomed the two false brothers to his band.

A few days after, he fell into a trap, and he and the greater part of his band were taken.

Picaut paid with his head for the bloody renown he had acquired. As he was much more of a highwayman and robber of diligences than a thief, he was sentenced, not to be shot, but to be guillotined.

He mounted the scaffold bravely, however, asking no more quarter for himself than he had accorded others.

Joseph, his elder son, was sent to the galleys with the other prisoners; while Pascal, who had escaped the ambushade, and returned to the forests, continued to lead a life of outlawry with the remains of the band.

But this wild life soon became odious to him; he longed for repose; and one fine day he entered the town of Beaupréau, handed his sword and his gun to the first soldier he met, and asked to be taken to the commandant of the garrison, to whom he told his story.

This officer, who commanded a brigade of dragoons, interested himself in the poor devil; and in consideration of his youth, and the singular confidence he had placed in him, he offered to take him into his regiment.

In case he refused, he should be compelled to hand him over to the civil authorities, he said.

Before such an alternative, Pascal Picaut, who had learned of the fate of his father and brother, and had no desire to return to his province, could not and did not hesitate.

He put on the uniform.

Fourteen years later the two sons of "No Quarter" met once more on coming to take possession of their father's little property.

The re-entry of the Bourbons had opened the doors of the prison to Joseph, and disbanded Pascal, who from brigand of La Vendée, had become brigand of the Loire.

Joseph, released from the galleys, returned to his cabin in a higher state of excitement than his father had ever shown, burning to be revenged upon the patriots for his father's death, and the tortures he had himself undergone.

Pascal, on the other hand, came home with very different opinions from those he formerly held, metamorphosed by the new world he had seen, and above all by having come in close contact with men to whom hatred of the Bourbons was a duty, the fall of Napoleon a bitter sorrow, and the entry of the allies a disgrace, — sentiments which were kept alive in his heart by the sight of the cross which he wore upon his breast.

However, in spite of a divergence of opinion which led to frequent discussions, and their habitual misunderstanding of each other, the two brothers had not separated, but had continued to occupy in common the house which their father had left them, and to cultivate, each one half, the fields which surrounded it.

Both were married: Joseph to the daughter of a poor peasant; Pascal, who was a person of some consideration in the country, by virtue of his cross and his small pension, had espoused the daughter of a citizen of Saint Philbert, a patriot like himself.

The presence of the two women in the common abode, both of whom were inclined, the one from envy and the other from dislike, to exaggerate the sentiments of their husbands, increased the lack of harmony in the *ménage*; and yet up to 1830 the brothers continued to live together.

The revolution of July, which Pascal had applauded,

aroused all of Joseph's fanatical exaltation; Pascal's father-in-law became mayor of Saint Philbert, and the Chouan and his wife heaped such vile insults upon these "dogs" that Madame Pascal declared to her husband that she would not live any longer with such gallows-birds, for she no longer felt safe among them.

The old soldier had no children, and was deeply attached to his brother's. There was one little yellow-haired fellow in particular, with plump, ruddy cheeks, whom he could not get along without; his greatest, indeed his only amusement, was to jump the little man on his knees for hours together. Pascal felt his heart-strings tighten at the thought of parting from his adopted son. Notwithstanding the wrongs he had suffered at his elder brother's hands, he had not ceased to love him; he thought of him impoverished by the necessary expense of maintaining his large family, and feared that his departure would leave him in destitution, so he refused to do what his wife asked.

They ceased to eat together, however; and as the house was composed of three rooms, Pascal left two to his brother, and took the third for himself, after walling up the door of communication.

In the evening of the day when Jean Oullier was arrested, Pascal Picaut's wife was very anxious.

Her husband had left the house about four o'clock, — just at the time, that is, when General Dermoncourt's column marched out of Montaigu. Pascal was going, so he said, to settle an account with Courtin of La Logerie; and although it was eight o'clock, he had not returned.

The poor woman's anxiety had become agonizing when she heard all the reports of firing on the banks of the Boulogne, not three hundred rods from her house.

Thus Marianne Picaut was awaiting her husband with

the keenest anxiety; and from time to time she would leave her spinning-wheel, which stood in the chimney-corner, to go and listen at the door.

When the reports ceased she heard nothing more except the wind whistling among the trees, or the plaintive cry of a dog in the distance.

Little Louis — the child whom Pascal was so fond of — came to ask if his uncle had returned, having also heard the firing; but he had scarcely shown his pretty little pink and white face at the door, when his mother roughly called him, and he disappeared.

For some days past Joseph had become more arrogant and threatening; and that very morning, before starting for Montaignu fair, he had had a scene with his brother, which, but for the old soldier's forbearance, would surely have led to bloodshed.

Therefore Pascal's wife did not dare to mention her uneasiness to her sister-in-law.

Suddenly she heard a sound of voices whispering mysteriously in the field in front of the cabin. She rose with such precipitation that she upset her spinning-wheel.

At the same instant the door opened and Joseph Picaut appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW MARIANNE PICAUT WEPT FOR HER HUSBAND.

THE sudden appearance of her brother-in-law, whom Marianne so little expected to see at that moment, together with a vague presentiment of evil which seized her at sight of him, produced so acute an impression upon the poor woman that she fell back upon her chair, half dead with terror.

Meanwhile Joseph approached his brother's wife slowly and without a word, while she stared at him with much the same expression with which she would have stared at a ghost.

When he reached the fireplace, Joseph, still mute, took a chair and sat down, and began to stir the ashes on the hearth with the stick he held in his hand.

As he came within the circle of light cast by the fire, Marianne could see that he was deathly pale.

"In God's name, Joseph," she asked him, "what's the matter?"

"Who were the wretches who came here this evening, Marianne?" asked the Chouan, answering one question by asking another.

"No one has been here," said Marianne, shaking her head to add emphasis to her reply.

Then in her turn, she inquired, —

"Did you meet your brother, Joseph?"

"Then who took him away from the house?" asked the Chouan, who seemed to have resolved to ask questions without answering any.

"Once more, nobody, I tell you; but about four o'clock this afternoon he left the house to go and pay the mayor of La Logerie for the buckwheat which he bought of him last week for you."

"The mayor of La Logerie?" rejoined Joseph, frowning. "Oh, yes! Master Courtin. A fine villain, that! A long time ago I said to Pascal, and I said it again this morning, 'Don't tempt the God whom you deny, or bad luck will come to you.'"

"Joseph! Joseph!" cried Marianne, "do you dare to mingle the name of God in your words of hatred for your brother, who loves you so dearly, you and yours, and would take the bread from his own mouth to give it to your children? If an evil fate wills that there shall be civil strife in our poor country, is that any reason why you should introduce it into our cabin? Keep to your opinions, for God's sake, and leave him his; his are harmless, and yours are not. His gun hangs in the fire-place, mixes in no plots, and threatens nobody, while there has n't been a day for six months when you have n't gone out, armed to the teeth; nor when you have not vomited threats against the people of the town where my parents live, and against ourselves as well."

"It's much better to go out, gun in hand, and to insult the dogs, as I do, than to basely betray those in whose midst one lives, than to bring more Blues among us, and to act as their guide when they invade our fields to pillage the châteaux of those who have held to their faith."

"Who acted as guide to the soldiers?"

"Pascal."

"When — where?"

"To-night, at the ford of Pont-Farcy."

"Great God! the firing was in the direction of the ford," cried Marianne.

Suddenly the poor woman's eyes became fixed and haggard. They were resting upon Joseph's hands.

"You have blood on your hands!" she cried. "Whose blood, Joseph? Tell me! whose blood is it?"

The Chouan's first impulse was to hide his hands, but he chose the bolder course.

"This blood," he replied, while his face changed from white to purple, "is the blood of a traitor to his God, his country, and his king; it is the blood of a man who forgot that the Blues sent his father to the scaffold and his brother to the galleys, and who was not afraid to serve them."

"You have killed my husband! You have murdered your brother!" cried Marianne, standing before Joseph with the fury of a madwoman.

"No, not I," said he.

"You lie!"

"I swear to you that I did n't do it."

"Then, if you swear that you did n't do it, swear also that you will help me to avenge him."

"Help you to avenge him! I, Joseph Picaut? No, no!" retorted the Chouan, bitterly; "for although I did n't put my hand upon him, I applaud those who did kill him; and if I had been in their place, although he was my brother, I swear by our Saviour that I would have done as they did!"

"Say that again," cried Marianne; "I hope I did n't hear aright."

The Chouan repeated word for word what he said before.

"Be cursed then, as I curse them!" shrieked Marianne, raising her hand above her brother-in-law's head with a terrible gesture of menace; "and this vengeance

which you scorn, but in which I include you, fratricide in purpose, if not in deed! two of us remain to accomplish,—God and myself. And if God fails me, why then I will accomplish it by myself!”

“And now where is he?” she continued with an impetuous energy which completely cowed the Chouan. “What did they do with his body? Speak! why don’t you speak? You will give me back his dead body, won’t you?”

“When I reached the spot, having heard the firing,” said Joseph, “he was still breathing. I took him in my arms to bring him here, but he died on the way.”

“And then you tossed him into a ditch, like a dog, I suppose, did you not, Cain? Oh, to think that I never would believe the story when I read it in the Bible!”

“No,” said Joseph, “I laid him down in the orchard.”

“*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*” cried the poor woman, whose body was shaken by convulsive trembling. “*Mon Dieu!* perhaps you were mistaken, Joseph,—perhaps there is still life in him; perhaps with immediate help and great care it may be possible to save him. Come with me, Joseph, come! And if we find him living, why I will forgive you for being the friend of your brother’s murderers.”

She seized the lamp and rushed out the door.

But instead of following her, Joseph, who had for some moments been listening to certain sounds without, which were clearly those of marching troops, and were approaching the cabin, waited until the house-door was no longer within the rays of the lamp carried by his sister-in-law, when he left the house, skirted the buildings, and passing through the hedge which separated him from the fields, darted away in the direction

of Machecoul forest, whose dark masses were outlined against the sky, five hundred feet away.

Poor Marianne, meanwhile, was running hither and thither in the orchard.

Bewildered, half insane with grief, she held the lamp over her head, forgetting to direct her gaze upon the circular space upon the turf lighted by it; it seemed to her as if to find her husband's corpse her eyes could pierce the blackest night.

Suddenly, as she was passing a spot she had already passed several times, she tripped, and came very near falling; and as she threw out her hands to save herself, they came in contact with a human body propped against a fence.

She uttered a terrible cry, threw herself upon the body, and pressed it close to her bosom; then, taking it in her arms, as she would have done with an infant, she carried it into the house and laid it on the bed.

Notwithstanding the strained relations of the brothers, Joseph's wife rose and ran into Pascal's part of the house.

As she saw her brother-in-law's dead body, she fell on her knees beside the bed, sobbing bitterly.

Marianne took the light her sister-in-law brought, — she had left her own at the place where she had found Pascal, — and passed it in front of her husband's face.

Pascal's mouth and eyes were wide open, as if he were still alive.

Marianne placed her hand upon his breast; the heart had ceased to beat.

Then turning to her sister-in-law, who was still weeping and praying, Pascal Picaut's widow, whose eyes were blazing like the brands on the hearth, cried aloud, —

“See what the Chouans have done to my husband!

See what Joseph has done to his brother! On this lifeless body I swear to give myself neither peace nor rest, until the assassins have paid for this deed with their blood!"

"And you shall not wait long, poor woman, or may I lose my name!" said a man's voice behind the two women.

They turned and saw an officer wrapped in a cloak, who had entered without being heard by them.

At the door they saw bayonets glistening in the shadow, and they heard the whinnying of horses, who smelt blood in the breeze.

"Who are you?" asked Marianne.

"An old soldier like your husband, — a man who has seen enough battle-fields to have the right to say to you that you must not bewail the fate of those who die, as he died, for their country's sake, but must avenge them."

"I am not complaining, monsieur," replied the widow, raising her head and shaking her scanty locks. "What brings you to our poor abode just as death has entered?"

"Your husband was to have guided us in an expedition of vital importance for the welfare of your unhappy province. This expedition may prevent the shedding of rivers of blood for a hopeless cause. Can you not give me some one to take his place?"

"Shall you fall in with the Chouans in your expedition?" inquired Marianne.

"It is probable," the officer replied.

"Well, then, I will be your guide!" cried the widow, taking her husband's gun from its place on the chimney-piece. "Where do you want to go? I will guide you, and you can pay me in cartridges."

"We want to go to the Château de Souday."

"Very well ; I will guide you. I know the way."

Casting a last glance upon the corpse of her husband, Pascal's widow preceded the general from the house, leaving Joseph's wife to pray by her brother-in-law's side.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH LOVE PROVIDES POLITICAL OPINIONS
FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NONE.

WE left young Baron Michel upon the point of taking a momentous step; but just as he was about to begin operations, he heard steps in the hall. He thereupon threw himself on his bed, with closed eyes but ears very wide open.

The steps passed by his door, and returned the next moment without stopping. It was not his mother's step, and it seemed to be nobody with designs upon him; so he opened his eyes again, and assuming a half-recumbent position, he began to reflect.

His musings were of serious import.

It had become necessary to break with his mother, whose lightest wishes were laws to him; to throw overboard the ambitious views she cherished for him, and which had had some fascination for the young baron for a time: it was necessary to say good-by to the honors of which the Government of July had promised to be lavish with the young millionaire, and to launch himself upon a mad enterprise which was sure to be bloody, and to bring in its train exile, confiscation of goods, perhaps death, but which Michel, young as he was, had enough good sense to know to be hopeless of success: it was necessary to do all that, or to submit to his fate and forget Mary.

Let us admit that Michel reflected for an instant, but he did not hesitate.

Obstinacy is the first consequence of weakness, which often carries obstinacy to the point of ferocity.

There were, moreover, too many sound arguments to stimulate the baron's inclination, to leave any hope that he would resist.

Honor made it his duty to warn the Comte de Bonneville of the danger which threatened him and the person who was with him. And upon this point he was afraid he had already delayed too long.

So, after reflecting a few seconds, he made up his mind.

Notwithstanding his mother's precautions, Michel had read novels enough to know how a simple pair of sheets might be made on occasion to do satisfactory duty as a ladder, and his thoughts naturally turned to that means of escape in the first place. Unluckily, his chamber windows were just over those of the pantry, where they would inevitably see him hovering between heaven and earth when he undertook his descent, — although, as we have said, night had begun to fall. Moreover, it was so far from his window to the ground that, despite his resolution to win the heart of his love at the price of countless risks, our young lover felt a cold sweat all over his body at the idea of hanging in mid-air at such a height with such a frail support.

There was an enormous Canada poplar directly opposite his windows, the branches of which came within four or five feet of the balcony.

To climb down that poplar, inexperienced as he was in bodily exercise, seemed easy enough to him. But he must first reach the branches, and he had not confidence enough in the elasticity of his legs to try the jump.

Necessity brought forth invention.

Rummaging around in his room, he found an angling outfit with which he had formerly waged war on the carp and perch of the lake of Grand-Lieu,—an innocent pastime which the maternal solicitude, exaggerated as it was, had thought best to consent to.

He took a fishing-rod, fastened a hook on the end of it, and placed it near the window.

Then he took a sheet from his bed and tied a heavy candlestick to one end of it (he needed something heavy, and the candlestick was under his hand, so he used the candlestick).

Then he threw the candlestick so that it fell on the farther side of one of the largest branches of the poplar, and then caught it with the hook on the end of his pole and pulled it back to the window; which done, he tied the two ends securely to the rail of the balcony, making a sort of suspension bridge, abundantly strong, between the window and the tree.

The young man straddled this improvised bridge as a sailor does a yard; and working himself slowly along, soon reached the tree, and in that way *terra-firma*.

Then, heedless whether he was seen or not, he raced across the lawn and took the road to Souday, with which no one was more familiar than he.

When he was on the summit of Servière Hill he heard rapid firing between Montaigu and the lake of Grand-Lieu.

He was profoundly moved and greatly excited.

Every one of the reports which came down to him on the wind produced a painful sensation, which was repeated in his heart. The noise, in fact, seemed to indicate danger, — perhaps even the death of those whom he loved; and the mere thought froze him stiff with alarm. And when he thought that Mary might accuse

him, and attribute to him the misfortunes which he had not warded off from her head and those of her father and sister and their friends, his eyes filled with tears.

Thus it was that the noise of the firing, far from slackening his gait, made him think only of greater speed. Accelerating his pace, he soon reached the first trees of Machecoul forest.

There, instead of following the road, which would have made his journey some minutes longer, he took a cross-path which he had taken more than once with a similar purpose of shortening the journey.

Beneath the dark arches formed by the tree-tops over his head, falling into a ditch from time to time, stumbling over rocks and rubbing against briars and thorns, so dark was the night and so narrow the path, he finally reached what was called the Val du Diable.

He was crossing the stream which flows through it when a man, rushing out suddenly from behind a clump of furze-bushes, threw himself upon him and seized him so suddenly that he overturned him into the muddy bed of the brook. Pressing the cold barrel of a pistol against his temple, he said, —

“Not a cry, not a word, or you are a dead man!”

This state of things, so uncomfortable for our young friend, lasted for a moment, which seemed to him a century.

The stranger had his knee upon his breast and held him as he had fallen, remaining motionless himself, as if expecting some one.

At last, as no one came, he imitated the cry of the screech-owl.

A similar signal answered him from the interior of the wood. A rapid stride was heard, and a new personage arrived upon the scene.

"Is it you, Picaut?" said the man who had the baron under his knee.

"No, it's not Picaut," was the reply; "it's I."

"Who are you?"

"I am Jean Oullier."

"Jean Oullier!" cried the first, with such exuberant delight that he half rose to his feet and afforded his prisoner proportionate relief. "Is it really you? You have really escaped from the Red Breeches?"

"Yes, thanks to you and my other friends. But we have n't a second to lose if we wish to avoid a great calamity."

"What's to be done? Now that you are free and with us, all will go well."

"How many men are with you?"

"There were eight of us when we left Montaignu. The Vieille-Vigne boys reinforced us, and we should muster fifteen to eighteen now."

"How about guns?"

"Everybody has one."

"Good! Where did you leave them?"

"On the edge of the wood."

"You must get them all together."

"Very well."

"You know the Carrefour des Ragots?"

"Like my own pocket."

"You will await the soldiers there, — not in ambush, but openly. Give the word to fire when they are twenty feet from your men. Kill as many of them as you can; there will be so many reptiles less."

"Very well; and then?"

"As soon as your guns are empty, you will separate into two parties; one will retreat by the La Cloutière path, the other by the road to Bourgnieux. You will

retreat slowly, and firing, of course; you must entice them to chase you."

"To turn them off their road, eh?"

"Precisely, Guérin! That's it precisely."

"Very good, but what about you?"

"I am off to Souday. I must be there in ten minutes."

"Oh, Jean Oullier!" said the peasant, dubiously.

"Well, what is it? Do you distrust me, by any chance?"

"I don't say that I distrust you, but that I don't trust anybody else."

"I must be at Souday in ten minutes, I tell you; and when Jean says '*I must*,' why, he must! Do you just keep the soldiers busy for half an hour; that's all I ask of you."

"Jean Oullier! Jean Oullier!"

"What is it?"

"Why, suppose the *gars* won't wait for the Red Breeches in the open?"

"Order them to do it in the name of God!"

"If it was you who ordered them, they would obey. But when I — And then there's Joseph Picaut, and you know very well that he will do what he sees fit in his own way."

"But if I don't go to Souday, who will go in my place?"

"I, if you are willing, Jean Oullier," said a voice which seemed to come out of the ground.

"Who spoke then?" asked the keeper.

"A prisoner that I just captured," replied the Chouan.

"What's his name?"

"Oh, I have n't asked him!"

"What's your name?" asked Jean, roughly.

"I am the Baron de la Logerie," replied the youth,

succeeding in attaining a sitting position; for the Vendean's iron hand had loosened its grasp in such way as to restore his freedom of motion, and he had profited by the opportunity to take a little breath.

"Ah, young Michel! You here again?" muttered Jean, in an undertone, and sullenly.

"Yes; when M. Guérin stopped me, I was on my way to Souday to warn my friend Bonneville and Petit-Pierre that their hiding-place was known."

"How did you know it?"

"I learned it last evening, listening to a conversation between my mother and Courtin."

"How is it, then, with such good intentions, that you have put off warning your friend so long as this?" retorted Jean Oullier, in a sneering, incredulous tone.

"Because the baronne shut me up in my room, which is on the second floor, and I was n't able to get away until to-night, when I escaped by the window at the risk of killing myself."

Jean Oullier reflected a moment. His prejudice against everything that came from La Logerie was so strong, and he hated so bitterly every one who bore the name of Michel, that he was very loath to accept the slightest service from the young man; for, in spite of his apparent frankness and innocence, the suspicious Vendean wondered if his good will was not a cloak for some treacherous design.

However, he realized that Guérin was right; that he alone, at a supreme crisis, could give the Chouans enough confidence in themselves to induce them to await the enemy's approach, and that he alone could carry out the necessary measures for retarding the progress of the soldiers.

Then, too, he reasoned with himself that Michel

would be better qualified than any peasant to explain to the Comte de Bonneville the danger which was impending. And so, still grumbling, he submitted to the necessity of putting himself under obligations to the young shoot of the Michel family.

But he could not help muttering, —

“Ah, you whelp! you may be sure that I do it because I can’t help it!”

“Well, so be it,” he added aloud.

“Go on, then! But have you got a pair of legs, I wonder?”

“They’re made of steel!”

“Humph!” said Jean.

“If Mademoiselle Bertha were here, she would back up what I say.”

“Mademoiselle Bertha!” exclaimed Jean Oullier, with a frown.

“Yes; it was I who went after the doctor for Père Tinguy. And I took only fifty minutes for the two leagues and a half, going and coming.”

Jean shook his head like a man who is far from being convinced.

“Look after your enemies,” said Michel, “and rely upon me. You would need ten minutes to go to Souday; I will agree to be there in five.”

The young man shook off the mud with which he was covered and made ready to start.

“Are you sure of the road?” Jean asked him.

“Am I sure of it? As sure as I am of the paths in the park of La Logerie. Good luck, Monsieur Jean Oullier!” he cried, darting off in the direction of the Château de Souday.

For a moment Jean stood as if dreaming. The familiar acquaintance which the baron had claimed

with the neighborhood of his master's abode disturbed him exceedingly.

"Oh, well," he growled at last, "we will put all that right when we have time!"

"Come, you," he said to Guérin, "call your boys."

The Chouan took off one of his shoes, and putting it to his mouth, blew into it in a way to imitate the howling of a wolf.

"Do you suppose they will hear that?" asked Jean.

"Sure! I came up the wind so as to be able to call them together if necessary."

"It's useless, then, to wait here for them. Let us go on to the Carrefour des Ragots; you can call them in as we go along, and we shall gain so much time."

"About how much ahead of the soldiers are you?" asked Guérin, diving into the underbrush in Oullier's wake.

"A good half-hour. They stopped at the farm of La Pichardière."

"La Pichardière?" exclaimed Guérin, abstractedly.

"To be sure; Pascal Picaut will act as their guide. Isn't he the man for that?"

"Pascal Picaut will never guide anybody again. Pascal Picaut will never wake again!" said Guérin, in solemn tones.

"Aha!" said Oullier, "then it was he?"

"Yes; it was."

"And you killed him?"

"He fought and called for help; the soldiers were within half a gunshot of us. We had to do it!"

"Poor Pascal!" exclaimed Jean.

"Yes, although he was on the wrong side," said Guérin, "he was an honest man."

"And his brother?" queried Oullier.

“ His brother ? ”

“ Yes, Joseph.”

“ He was looking on,” said Guérin.

Jean Oullier shook himself, like a wolf who receives a charge of buck-shot in his side. His sturdy nature had forced itself to accept all the consequences of a terrible struggle, as civil conflicts always are; but he had not foreseen this, and it made him shiver with horror.

To conceal his emotion from Guérin, he quickened his step, and unmindful of the darkness, made his way over the bushes and willow clumps as rapidly as when he was supporting his dogs.

Guérin, who stopped now and then to blow in his shoe, could hardly keep up with him.

Suddenly he heard him whistling softly to warn him to halt.

At that moment they had arrived at a spot called the Saut de Baugé, only a short distance from the Carrefour des Ragots.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SAUT DE BAUGÉ.

THE Saut de Bauge is a bog, beyond which the road to Souday ascends almost perpendicularly. It is one of the most abrupt and steepest grades in that hilly forest.

The column of the "Red Breeches," as Guérin called the soldiers, must in the first place cross the bog, and then ascend the hill.

Jean Oullier had reached the point where the road, there consisting of bushes and hurdles, runs across the bog and continues up the ascent.

He stopped there, as we have said, and whistled to Guérin, who found him deep in thought.

"Well," queried Guérin, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking," was the reply, "that perhaps this is a better place than the Carrefour des Ragots."

"Especially as there's this old cart here, which we can hide behind," said Guérin.

Jean examined with some attention the object pointed out by his companion, which he had not noticed.

It was a heavy cart, loaded with wood, which had been left for the night on the edge of the swamp, doubtless because those in charge of it had been overtaken by the darkness and had not dared to risk the journey over the narrow road, which stretched across the muddy hole like a bridge.

"I have an idea," said Oullier, looking first at the cart and then at the hill which towered darkly up on

the other side. "But it is necessary —" he added, looking behind.

"What is necessary?"

"That the boys should join us."

"Here they are," said Guérin. "See, here's Patry, here are the Gambier brothers, the people from Vieille-Vigne, and Joseph Picaut."

Oullier turned away to avoid looking at the last-named.

The Chouans did, in truth, appear on all sides; one or more started up from behind every tree and out of every bush.

Soon they were all together.

"My *gars*," said Jean Oullier, "since La Vendée has been La Vendée, that is to say since she learned to fight, there never has been a day when her children have been more loudly called upon to show their courage and their faith. If we do not check Louis Philippe's troops, I think that a great misfortune will befall; so great a misfortune, my children, that all the glory of our province will be effaced. For myself, I am fully determined to leave my bones in the Saut de Baugé before I will allow this infernal column to pass."

"So will we, Jean Oullier," said every voice.

"Good! I expected no less from the men who followed me from Montaigu, to rescue me, and succeeded. Come now, to make a beginning, what do you say to helping me push this cart to the top of the hill."

"Let's try it," said the Vendéans.

Oullier put himself at their head, and the heavy vehicle, some pushing by the wheels, others behind, while eight or ten drew it by the shafts, passed safely across the bog, and was hoisted rather than pulled to the summit of the hill.

When Oullier had wedged the wheels with stones so that it would not descend by its own weight the grade it had been so unwilling to ascend, he said to his companions,—

“Now, do you go and lie in hiding on each side of the swamp, half on the right, half on the left; and when the time comes,—that is to say, when I give the word, ‘fire!’—do you blaze away. If the soldiers turn and follow you, as I hope they will, retreat slowly toward Grand-Lieu in such a way as to draw them after you, if possible, and away from Souday, where they are bound. If, on the other hand, they keep straight ahead, why then we will go, every one, and wait for them at the Carrefour des Ragots. That is the spot where we must make a last stand, and die at our posts.”

The Chouans descended to their ambush on the sides of the swamp, and left Jean and Guérin together.

The former threw himself flat on his stomach, and put his ear to the ground.

“They are coming,” he said; “they are coming straight along the Souday road, as if they knew it perfectly well. Who the devil can be guiding them, now that Pascal Picaut is dead?”

“They must have found some peasant at the farm, and pressed him into service.”

“In that case there’s another guide to be taken from them. In the depths of Machecoul forest, without a guide, not one of them will ever get back to Montaigu!”

“Indeed they won’t! But you are not armed, Jean Oullier.”

“Aha!” replied the old Vendean, laughing between his teeth. “I have a weapon which will do more execution than your carbine; and in ten minutes, if every-

thing goes as I hope, never you fear that there'll be any lack of guns along the Saut de Baugé."

He rose as he spoke, and went back up the hill to the cart, having gone half-way down to see that his men were disposed as he wished.

It was full time; as he reached the crest of the ridge, he heard stones rolling under the horses' feet on the opposite slope, and saw the sparks, struck by their iron hoofs.

The very air, too, was alive with the commotion which announces the approach of a body of armed men, in the night.

"Go, and join your men," he said to Guérin; "I remain here."

"What for?"

"You'll soon find out."

Guérin obeyed.

Jean Oullier glided under the cart and waited.

Guérin had scarcely taken his place with his companions when the two chasseurs acting as the advance-guard reached the edge of the swamp.

Seeing the doubtful character of the ground, they stopped, undecided what to do.

"Straight ahead!" cried a firm voice, of feminine quality. "Straight ahead!"

The chasseurs rode on into the swamp, and thanks to the bush-marked road, they crossed it without accident, and kept on up the slope, rapidly drawing near to the cart, and consequently to Jean Oullier.

When they were within twenty feet of him, Jean, under the cart, seized the rear axle with his hands, and putting his feet up on the forward one, drew himself close up against the cart-body, and remained perfectly still.

The chasseurs soon reached the spot, and examined

the vehicle closely from their saddles, but seeing nothing to arouse suspicion, they passed on.

The main column was then on the edge of the swamp.

The widow crossed first, then the general, then the chasseurs, and the infantry next and last.

Just as they reached the other side, a sound like the rumbling of thunder came from the crest of the slope they were about to ascend; the earth shook beneath their feet, and an avalanche came roaring down from the hill-top with the rapidity of lightning.

"Clear the track!" cried Dermoncourt, in a voice which rose above the horrible uproar.

Seizing the widow by the arm, he drove his spurs into his horse, who leaped aside into the bushes.

The general thought of his guide first of all; she was, for the moment, his most precious possession.

He and his guide were saved.

But the greater part of the soldiers had no time to obey their leader's order. Paralyzed by the extraordinary noise, and unable to tell with what new foe they had to deal, blinded by the darkness, and feeling that danger lay on every side, they remained in the middle of the road, and the loaded cart — for it was that, which Jean Oullier had started down the hill — ploughed through the living mass, as it had been an enormous cannon-ball, and dealt blows right and left among them, killing those who fell under its wheels, and wounding such as were struck with its freight.

A moment of stupefaction followed the disaster; but Dermoncourt was not a victim to it.

"Forward, men! forward!" he cried in stentorian tones, "and let us get out of this hole as fast as we can!"

At the same moment, a voice no less powerful than the general's shouted, —

"Fire away, boys!"

A flash came from every bush on the borders of the swamp, and a storm of bullets whistled about the little band.

The voice which gave the order to fire came from a point in advance of the column, while all the firing was in the rear; and the general, who was an old hand at this sort of warfare, and as cunning as Jean Oullier himself, understood the trick.

"Forward!" he cried; "don't lose a moment in answering their fire. Forward! forward!"

The troop pushed on, and despite the incessant fusillade, reached the top of the hill.

While the general and his men were making their way up the slope, Jean Oullier, sheltered by the bushes, rapidly descended, and joined his companions.

"Bravo!" said Guérin. "Ah, if we had only had ten pairs of arms like yours, and a few more loaded carts like that, we should be free of the cursed soldiers for good and all."

"Humph!" rejoined Oullier, "I am not so well pleased as you seem to be. I hoped they would turn back, and they have done nothing of the sort; they have apparently kept right on. To the Carrefour des Ragots then, as fast as our legs will carry us."

"Who says that the Red Breeches have gone on?" asked a voice.

Oullier approached the spot whence the voice came, and recognized Joseph Picaut. The Vendean, with one knee on the ground, and his gun by his side, was conscientiously emptying the pockets of three soldiers whom Jean's ponderous projectile had overthrown and crushed to death.

The old keeper turned away in disgust.

"Listen to Joseph," said Guérin in Oullier's ear; "listen to him; for he can see in the dark like a cat, and his advice is not to be despised."

"Well now, I pretend to say," continued Picaud stuffing his booty in a wallet which he invariably carried with him,—"I pretend to say that since they got to the top of the hill, the Blues have n't stirred a rod. Have n't you any ears, you fellows, that you don't hear them stamping around up there like sheep in their fold? Well, if you don't hear them, I do!"

"We must make sure," said Oullier to Guérin, thus avoiding the necessity of replying to Joseph.

"You are right, Jean Oullier, and I will go myself," Guérin answered.

He crossed the swamp, climbed half-way up the hill, and then, lying flat on his face, crawled like an adder between the rocks and bushes, and so softly that the leaves hardly moved as he passed along.

In this way he reached a point two thirds up the hill. When he was within thirty feet of the top, he stood up, put his hat on the end of a bough, and waved it above his head. On the instant a shot rang out from the summit, and the hat flew twenty feet away from its owner.

"He was right," said Jean Oullier, as he heard the report. "But how does it happen that they have renounced their plan? Was their guide killed?"

"Their guide was not killed," said Joseph, in a sinister voice.

"Did you see him?" asked a voice; for Oullier seemed determined not to speak directly to Picaud.

"Yes."

"Recognize him?"

"Yes."

"Then," muttered Oullier to himself, "it must be that they have had enough of quagmires, and the air of the marsh seems unhealthy to them. They're out of reach of our bullets behind those rocks, and no doubt they mean to stay there till daylight."

In fact they soon saw a few feeble fires starting up along the crest of the ridge; they gradually burned brighter, increasing in size, until the bushes which grew in the crevices of the cliffs could be clearly seen in the ruddy light.

"This is all very strange, if their guide is still with them," said Oullier. "However, it's possible; and as they will still go by way of the Carrefour des Ragots, if they change their mind, do you Guérin," he added as he saw that the scout had returned to his place by his side, "go there with your men."

"Very well," said Guérin.

"If they keep on toward Souday, you know what to do; if on the other hand they really have bivouacked at the Saut de Baugé, you can leave them to stew around their fire; it will be useless to attack them."

"Why so?" interposed Picaut.

Thus directly questioned as leader, and regarding an order given by himself, Oullier had no choice but to reply.

"Because," he said, "it's a crime to expose the life of brave men for no purpose."

"Why not say right out, Jean Oullier —"

"Say what?" demanded the old keeper, interrupting him quickly.

"Say, 'Because my masters, the noblemen, whose servant I am, no longer need to have these brave men throw away their lives;' if you said that, you would tell the truth for once, Jean Oullier."

"Who says that Jean Oullier ever lied?" demanded the old man, with a dark frown.

"I do!" said Picaut.

Oullier ground his teeth, but restrained his wrath; he seemed determined to have neither friendship nor quarrel with the ex-galley slave.

"I say so!" repeated Picaut; "I who undertake to say that it is through no tenderness for our bodies that you choose to prevent us from profiting by our victory, but because you have got us to fight only to prevent the Red Breeches from pillaging the Château de Souday."

"Joseph Picaut," retorted Jean, calmly, "although we wear the same cockade, we do not follow the same paths, nor strive for the same end; I have always held that whatever their opinions, men were brothers, and I take no pleasure in shedding my brother's blood from mere wantonness, when no good purpose is to be served. As for my relations with my masters, I have always considered humility to be the first duty of a Christian, especially when the Christian is a poor peasant like you and me. In short, I have always looked upon obedience as the soldier's most imperative duty. I know that you don't think as I do; so much the worse for you! Under other circumstances I would perhaps make you repent what you just said; but at this moment I do not belong to myself, — thank your God for that!"

"Oh, well," sneered Picaut, "when you get possession of yourself again, you know where to find me, don't you, Jean Oullier? And you won't have to look long for me."

"Now," he continued, turning to the little troop, "if there are any among you who think it's foolish or worse to wait till the hare is on the alert when you can take him in bed, let them come with me."

He started to move away, but not a soul stirred, or said a word.

Picaut, when his proposition was received thus with universal silence, made an angry gesture, and plunged into the thickets.

Jean Oullier took his words for mere bravado, and dismissed them with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"Be off, boys, be off!" he said to the Chouans, "to the Carrefour des Ragots, at double quick! Follow the bed of the stream as far as the Quatres-Vents, and in fifteen minutes you will be there."

"And you, Jean Oullier?" queried Guérin.

"Oh, I must hurry off to Souday," replied the old keeper, "and see if Michel did as he agreed."

The little squad marched obediently away, following down the course of the stream, as Oullier had advised.

The old man was left alone.

He listened for a few seconds to the splashing of the water by the Chouans, but the noise was soon indistinguishable from that of the many little water-falls, and he turned his head toward the soldiers.

The rocks upon the summit where the column had halted formed a little ridge running from east to west, in the direction of Souday.

On the east it came to an end, about two hundred feet from the spot on which the foregoing incidents had occurred, in a gentle slope down to the stream, whose bed the Chouans had taken to turn the enemy's camp.

On the west it continued for nearly half a league; and as it approached Souday, it became even steeper and higher, and its sides more precipitous and bare.

On this side it ended in a real precipice, formed by

enormous perpendicular rocks, rising sheer from the brook which moistened their base.

Once or twice in his life perhaps, Jean Oullier had risked the descent of this precipice in order to outstrip the boar his dogs were pursuing.

The descent was made by a path hidden by tufts of furze, barely a foot wide; it was called the *Viette des Biques*, — that is to say, the goat's path, — and was known only to a few hunters.

Jean Oullier himself had made the descent with such difficulty, and at such great risk, that it seemed impossible to him that any one should dream of using that pass in the night time.

If then the leader of the hostile force desired to pursue his aggressive movement upon Souday, he must either follow the road, and in that case fall in with the Chouans at the *Carrefour des Ragots*, or retrace his steps and descend by the practicable slope to the brook, which the Chouans had made use of.

But the brook received a considerable tributary only a short distance below; it became a torrent, and a rapid one at that, and its banks were covered with briers which made them impenetrable. Therefore there was no danger to be apprehended in that direction.

Nevertheless, Jean Oullier was decidedly ill at ease, as if with a presentiment of evil.

It seemed to him altogether unaccountable that Derrmoncourt's determination should have yielded thus at the first attack, and that he should so suddenly and so easily have given up his designs upon Souday.

Instead of leaving the place, as he had said, he gazed at the height above him, thoughtfully and uneasily, and it seemed to him as if the fires were losing their brilliancy, and as if the light they threw upon the rocks

which sheltered them from the wind was becoming feebler and feebler.

He soon made up his mind: he took the same course Guérin had taken, and employed similar tactics; only he did not stop, as Guérin had done, two thirds of the way up. He crawled on until he reached the foot of the enormous blocks of stone which formed a sort of girdle around the summit.

Then he listened intently, but heard not the slightest sound.

He softly raised himself to his full height, and peered through between two rocks, but saw nothing.

The place was deserted, the fires were untended, and the furze branches, with which they were covered, were crackling all to themselves, and burning themselves out in the silence.

Jean Oullier climbed through between the rocks, and leaped down upon the spot where he had supposed the soldiers to be. Not a soldier was to be seen.

Then he uttered a terrible cry, partly of rage, and partly to call his comrades, and with the swiftness of a hunted stag, urging his muscles of steel to their utmost, he rushed along the rocky ridge toward Souday.

There was no room for doubt; the unknown guide, or rather the guide whom only Joseph Picaut knew, had guided the soldiers to the *Viette des Biques*.

Great as were the obstacles which the nature of the ground offered to Jean Oullier's progress, slipping upon flat rocks hidden in the moss like grave-stones, stumbling over granite boulders which were scattered along his path like soldiers on sentry, entangling his feet in thorns which tore his flesh, — he covered the whole length of the ridge in ten minutes.

When he reached its extremity, he climbed a little

elevation which overlooked the valley, and saw the soldiers.

They were just reaching the foot of the precipice; they had taken all the risks of the Viette des Biques, and by the light of the torches which they carried, he could see them filing serpent-like along the valley.

Jean Oullier pushed with all his strength against the enormous rock he had mounted, hoping to loosen it, and send it crashing down upon their heads. But his bursts of mad rage were powerless; a sneering laugh answered the imprecations with which he accompanied them.

He turned his head, with the thought that none but Satan could laugh like that, and saw Joseph Picaut.

"Well, Master Jean," said he, rising up from behind a furze-bush, "in my opinion my lookout was keener than yours; only you made me waste my time. I arrived too late, and now your friends may get cooked."

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" cried Oullier, tearing his hair, "who, in Heaven's name, could guide them down the Viette des Biques?"

"At all events," said Picaut, "the one who did it shall not guide them back again, over that road or any other. Look at her now, Jean Oullier, if you want to see her alive."

Jean Oullier leaned forward again.

The soldiers had crossed the brook, and formed around the general. In the midst of them, hardly a hundred yards away, but separated from the two men by a yawning chasm, they espied a woman, who was pointing out to the general with her finger the road he was to take.

"Marianne Picaut!" cried Oullier.

The Chouan made no reply; but he put his gun to his shoulder, and deliberately took aim.

Jean Oullier turned around at the noise the villain made, and threw up the gun-barrel just as he pulled the trigger.

"Wretch!" he cried, "at least give her time to bury your brother."

The shot was spent in the air, and the bullet lost itself in space.

"Damn you!" yelled Picaut, in a furious rage, seizing his gun by the barrel, and aiming a terrible blow with the stock at the head of Jean Oullier, who was entirely unprepared for the attack; "damn you, I treat such Whites as you just as I treat the Blues!"

Notwithstanding his herculean strength, the old Vendean fell, first upon his knees, but not being able to maintain that position, he rolled over the cliff. As he fell, he tried to save himself by holding on to a tuft of furze which his hand instinctively seized; but he felt it yield gradually with the weight of his body.

Dizzy as he was, Oullier did not lose consciousness altogether, and expecting every instant that the fragile twigs which held him suspended over the abyss would break in his hands, he commended his soul to God.

At that moment he heard shots upon the heath, and saw the accompanying flashes through his half-closed eyes.

Hoping that the Chouans had come up, under Guérin's guidance, he tried to shout; but his voice seemed to be imprisoned in his chest, and he could not raise the leaden hand which stopped the breath on his lips.

He was like a man in a fearful nightmare; and the pain caused by the suspense became so acute that he imagined — forgetting the blow he had received — that he could see the bloody sweat pouring down from his forehead upon his chest.

Gradually his strength left him, his fingers relaxed, as did all his muscles, and his agony was the more terrible because it seemed to him as if he were voluntarily relinquishing his hold upon the twigs which kept him from falling into space.

Soon he felt as if he were being drawn into the chasm by an irresistible force, and his fingers relinquished their last support.

But just as he was expecting to hear the air roaring and rushing about him as he fell, to feel the sharp points of the rocks tear his flesh, strong arms seized him and bore him to a little ledge which extended several feet out from the face of the cliff.

He was saved.

These arms, however, shook him very roughly for the arms of a well-wisher.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GUESTS AT SOUDAY.

THE day following the arrival of the Comte de Bonneville and his companion at the Château de Souday, the marquis returned from his expedition, or conference.

As he alighted from his horse the worthy gentleman exhibited the most fiendish ill-temper.

He took his daughters roundly to task for not coming to the door to meet him, hurled maledictions at Jean Oullier for taking leave to go to Montaignu fair without his consent, and quarrelled with the cook, who, in the absence of the major-domo, came to hold his stirrup, and instead of holding the one on the off-side, clung with all her strength to the other, and thereby forced the marquis to alight on the side away from the steps.

As he entered the parlor, M. de Souday continued to vent his wrath in such energetic monosyllabic terms, that Bertha and Mary, accustomed as their ears were to the liberties which the old *émigré* allowed himself in the matter of language, hardly knew which way to look.

In vain did they put forth their sweetest blandishments to smooth the wrinkles from their father's careworn brow; nothing seemed to have that effect. And as he warmed his feet at the fire, the marquis went on switching his high boots with the whip he held in his hand, apparently deeply grieved because said boots were not Messieurs So-and-so and So-and-so, to whom he applied many expressive and uncomplimentary epithets while he toyed with the handle of his whip.

Yes, the marquis was decidedly out of sorts.

In fact, for some time he had been getting tired of the pleasures of the chase; he had been taken in the act of gaping over the whist which regularly terminated his evenings; the joys of farming had become insipid, and life at Souday was almost unbearable to him.

Furthermore, his legs had not for ten years had so much elasticity, nor had his breath been so full and free, nor his mind so active.

He was entering on the old men's Indian summer, — the season when their minds throw out a more brilliant light before fading away forever, when their bodies summon all their strength, as if to prepare for the last supreme struggle. And the marquis, finding himself younger and more nimble than he had been for years, and ill content with the tedious round of his unsatisfactory, every-day occupations, felt *ennui* stealing over him, and thought that the excitement of a new Vendée would be just the thing for his new youth. Not for an instant did he doubt that he would find again, in the adventurous life of the partisan, all the profound enjoyment of which the memory beguiled his later days.

Therefore he had enthusiastically welcomed the prospect of an uprising. And a political disturbance of that sort, coming just in the nick of time, would afford one more proof of something which he had in his placid, naïve egotism many times fancied; to wit, that the whole world was created and kept in motion for the more perfect satisfaction of such a worthy personage as the Marquis de Souday. But he had found among his co-religionists a lukewarmness and a desire for compromise which exasperated him.

Some claimed that public opinion was not ripe;

others that it was imprudent to make any attempt without being assured of a defection in the army. Others had insisted that religious and political enthusiasm was quite dead among the peasants, and that it would be difficult to induce them to fight. And the impulsive marquis, who could not believe that all France was not ready, since a little campaign seemed to him a charming pastime, and Jean Oullier had cleaned up his best carbine, and his daughters had embroidered a scarf and a bleeding heart, — the marquis, we say, had bluntly told his friends what he thought of them, and returned to his château, disgusted with the world in general.

Mary, who knew how deeply her father respected the old-fashioned traditions of hospitality, took advantage of a slight lull in the testy old gentleman's ill-humor to announce to him mildly the presence of the Comte de Bonneville at the château, hoping thus to turn him aside from his wrath.

"Bonneville! Bonneville! Who's Bonneville?" grumbled the marquis. "Some petty clerk or lawyer, I suppose, — one of those officers who spring up with their epaulets all on, or one of the braggarts who have never fired a shot except with their tongue; a coxcomb who will sagely inform us that we must wait and let Philippe exhaust his popularity! As if, even supposing popularity to be essential, it would not be a much simpler way to work it up for our king!"

"I see that M. le Marquis is in favor of an immediate appeal to arms," said a sweet, flute-like little voice at Souday's elbow.

He turned toward the voice, and saw a young man in peasant's garb leaning, as he was, against the chimney, and warming his feet also at the fire.

The stranger had come noiselessly in at a side door; and the marquis, whose back was turned to him when he entered, was too absorbed in heated objurgations to take heed of the signs by which his daughters tried to inform him that one of their guests was present.

Petit-Pierre — for it was he — appeared to be about sixteen to eighteen years of age; but he was very slender and frail for his years. His face was pale, and the long black curls, which formed a frame for it, made its pallor more striking. His great blue eyes shone with intellect and spirit; his finely cut mouth, slightly turned up at the corners, was lightened with a mischievous smile. His prominent chin implied strength of will beyond the common. Lastly, a slightly aquiline nose completed a physiognomy the distinguished cast of which contrasted oddly with his costume.

“M. Petit-Pierre,” said Bertha, taking the newcomer by the hand and presenting him to her father.

The marquis bowed low, and the young peasant responded with a graceful salute.

The old *émigré* was but little puzzled by the costume and name of Petit-Pierre. The great war had accustomed him to such sobriquets, beneath which people of the highest rank concealed their identity, and to the disguises to which they resorted to hide their natural distinction. He was extremely interested, however, by the excessive youth of his guest.

“Mesdemoiselles de Souday tell me, monsieur,” said he, “that they were fortunate enough last evening to be able to be of some service to you and your friend M. le Comte de Bonneville. I am doubly sorry that I was absent from my house. Except for the disagreeable drudgery these gentlemen put upon me, I should have had the honor of opening my poor château to you

myself. However, I trust that these jades realized that it was their duty to fill my place, and that nothing consistent with our modest station has been neglected to make your wretched place of shelter supportable."

"Your hospitality, Monsieur le Marquis, could not fail to gain from being exercised by such charming substitutes," replied Petit-Pierre, gallantly.

"Humph!" grunted the marquis, protruding his lower lip, "at any other time than this they would not be at a loss to provide a little recreation for their guests. Bertha, here, can pick up a scent or turn a boar with the best, while Mary hasn't her equal in accurate knowledge of the haunts of the woodcock. But aside from some little skill at whist, which they get from me, I look upon them as decidedly ill equipped to do the honors of a drawing-room. And here we have been tied up in a hard and fast *tête-à-tête* with our fire-brands," added M. de Souday, with a vicious kick at the specimens of that article on the hearth, which showed that his wrath still endured.

"In my opinion, very few ladies at court can boast of as much grace and distinction as these damsels, and I assure you that there are none among them in whom these qualities are found in conjunction with the nobility of heart and mind of which your daughters have given proof, Monsieur le Marquis."

"At court?" exclaimed the marquis, looking at Petit-Pierre in surprised inquiry.

Petit-Pierre blushed and smiled, like an actor who has missed a point in the presence of a well-disposed audience.

"I speak presumptively, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, with an embarrassment too marked to be assumed. "I say at court, because your daughters' names denote

that as the place where they should be; because, in short, I would like to see them there."

The marquis blushed because he had caused his guest to blush. He had unwittingly encroached upon the incognito which he chose to preserve, and the old gentleman's keen sense of what hospitality demanded reproached him bitterly for his bad taste.

Petit-Pierre hastily continued:—

"I was saying to you, Monsieur le Marquis, when these young ladies did me the honor to present me to you, that you are evidently one of those who desire an immediate resort to arms."

"*Ventrebleu!* I may admit as much to you, monsieur, who, so far as I can judge, are one of us —"

Petit-Pierre bowed affirmatively.

"Yes, I do desire just that," the marquis continued; "but no matter what I say or do, nobody will believe the old fellow who singed his hair in the terrible fire which burned throughout the province from '93 to '97. They will listen to a pack of bragging fools, of briefless advocates, of handsome dandies who are afraid to sleep in the open air or to tear their coats on the bushes; of milksops, of —" the marquis began stamping furiously again upon the burning sticks, which took their revenge by sending thousands of sparks out upon his boots.

"Father," said Mary, softly, observing Petit-Pierre's amused smile, "father, pray don't get so excited!"

"Yes, I will get excited," retorted the irascible old fellow. "Everything was ready; Jean Oullier assured me that my division was absolutely howling with enthusiasm. And now, on the 14th May, we are put off again until the Greek Kalends!"

"Patience, Monsieur le Marquis," interposed Petit-Pierre, "the hour will come."

"Patience! patience! It's very easy for you to say that!" exclaimed the marquis, with a sigh. "You are young, and have time to wait; but as for me, who knows whether God will grant me enough more days on earth to see the old flag, beneath which I have fought so joyously, unfurled again?"

The old man's lament touched Petit-Pierre.

"But have you not heard, as I have, Monsieur le Marquis," he asked, "that the uprising is postponed only on account of the uncertainty which now exists as to the arrival of the princesse?"

This question seemed to redouble the marquis's ill-humor.

"Leave me in peace, pray, young man," he said in a deeply offended tone. "Do you think I don't know that old joke? During the five years that I fought in La Vendée, did they ever cease to promise that we should soon see that royal sword which was to be the rallying point for all our ambitious hopes? Was I not one of those who waited for the Comte d'Artois on the shores of Ile Dieu, on the 2d October? We shall not see this princesse in 1832 any more than we saw that prince in 1796! That, however, will not prevent my giving my life for them, as it is a gentleman's duty to do. The branches ought to fall with the old trunk."

"Monsieur le Marquis de Souday," said Petit-Pierre, in a voice which shook with emotion, "I swear to you that Madame la Duchesse de Berry, though she had only a walnut-shell at her service, would have crossed the sea to take her place under the flag which Charette bore so valiantly and nobly. I swear to you that she will come now — if not to conquer, at least to die with those who are in arms — to assert the rights of her son!"

There was such energy in his tones, and it was so

extraordinary to hear such words from the mouth of a young peasant of sixteen, that Souday gazed at his interlocutor in profound amazement.

"Pray, who are you?" said he, giving way to his surprise; "who are you who speak thus of her royal Highness's determination, and take upon yourself to say what she will do, young man, — child, I should say?"

"I had the impression, Monsieur le Marquis, that Mademoiselle de Souday, when she presented me, did me the honor to mention my name."

"To be sure, Monsieur Petit-Pierre," said the marquis, in some confusion. "A thousand pardons! But," he continued, addressing with greater interest than before the young man whom he imagined to be the son of some great personage, "would it be indiscreet to ask your opinion as to the policy of taking up arms at once? Young though you may be, you talk so sensibly that I will not conceal my wish to know how you feel."

"I am so much the more willing to express my opinion, Monsieur le Marquis, because it coincides so nearly with yours."

"Really?"

"My opinion, if I may be permitted to express one —"

"Permitted, indeed! Why, after the wretched trimmers I talked with last night, you seem to me like one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece!"

"You are too kind! I am of the opinion, then, Monsieur le Marquis, that it's very unfortunate that we did n't come out of our lairs, as agreed, on the night of the 13th and 14th May."

"There, you see! What did I tell them? And your reasons, monsieur?"

"These are my reasons. The soldiers were cantoned

among the villages, billeted in private houses, scattered, — in many cases far apart, — with no discipline and no rallying-point! Nothing could have been simpler than to surprise them and disarm them before they recovered from their surprise."

"Very true; while now —"

"Now — two days since, that is — orders were given to abandon the little cantonments, to draw tighter the meshes of the military network which envelops the country, and to form camps, not by companies, but by battalions and regiments. To-day we must fight a pitched battle to obtain the result which a wakeful night would have given us."

"That is conclusive reasoning!" cried the marquis, enthusiastically; "and I am in despair to think that, in all the thirty-six reasons I gave my opponents, I never thought to include that! But," he continued, "are you very sure, monsieur, that these orders you speak of have been given the troops?"

"Very sure," said Petit-Pierre, with the most modest expression he was able to manage.

The marquis looked at his guest, dumfounded.

"It's a shame," he muttered; "an infernal shame! However, as you say, my young friend, — if you will permit me to give you that title, — the best way is to wait patiently until this new Maria-Theresa comes to take her place among her new Hungarians, and meanwhile to drink to the health of her royal offspring and the flag without a stain. With that object in view, it would be well if these young women would condescend to look after our lunch, as Jean Oullier is away; as some one," he added with a half-indignant glance at his daughters, "thought fit to send him to Montaigu without orders from me."

"That some one is myself, Monsieur le Marquis," said Petit-Pierre, in a tone which, though perfectly courteous, was none the less firm. "I beg your pardon for having thus made free with one of your men, but it was very important that we should have accurate information as to the feeling of the peasants assembled at Montaigu fair."

There was in this smooth, softly modulated voice so much natural self-confidence, such evident consciousness of the superiority of the speaker, that the marquis was completely bewildered. As he passed in review in his mind all the great people he used to know, trying to guess whose child this could be, he could only stammer a few words of assent.

At this moment the Comte de Bonneville entered the apartment; and Petit-Pierre claimed the honor, as an old acquaintance of the marquis, of presenting her friend to their host.

The open, frank, and jovial features of the comte immediately won the favor of the marquis, who was already captivated by his young companion. He abjured his bad temper, and swore that he would think no more of the cowardice of his future companions in arms than of last year's blank covers; but as he invited his guests to precede him to the dining-hall, he vowed that he would use all his address to induce the Comte de Bonneville to betray the incognito of this mysterious Petit-Pierre.

Meanwhile Mary came in and announced to her father that luncheon was served.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH THE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY BITTERLY REGRETS
THAT PETIT-PIERRE IS NOT A GENTLEMAN.

THE two young men, followed by the marquis, reached the dining-room door, but stopped on the threshold.

The appearance of the table was, in very truth, appalling.

In the centre towered a majestic paté of boar and kid, just as the ancient citadel towered over the whole city. A pike of some fifteen pounds, three or four chickens *en daube*, a veritable Tower of Babel of cutlets, and a pyramid of young rabbits with green sauce flanked this citadel on the north, south, east, and west; and M. de Souday's cook had surrounded them, in the manner of outposts, with a thick cordon of dishes which touched one another and provided the approaches with ammunition of all kinds; *hors d'œuvre entrées*, *entremets*, vegetables, salads, fruits, and preserves, — all this huddled and heaped together in unpicturesque confusion, which was, however, full of attractions for appetites whetted by the keen air of the forests of the Mauge country.

"*Tudieu!*" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, recoiling, as we have said, at sight of this enormous store of provender; "upon my word, you treat poor peasants with too much ceremony, Monsieur de Souday."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I have nothing to do with it! You must neither blame nor thank me; it concerns these girls. But it is needless, is it not, for me to tell

you that I should be very happy if you would do justice to the good cheer of a poor country gentleman?"

The marquis pushed Petit-Pierre before him towards a seat at that groaning board which he seemed almost afraid to approach.

Petit-Pierre yielded to the impulsion, but with certain mental reservations.

"I should not dare to promise to meet your expectations, Monsieur le Marquis," said he, "for I must humbly confess that I am but a poor eater."

"I understand," said the marquis; "you are accustomed to more delicate dishes. For my own part, I am a true peasant, and I prefer good substantial food, filled with the juices fitted to repair the stomach's diminished strength, to all the kickshaws of the tables of the great."

"I have heard very learned discussions on that subject," said Petit-Pierre, "between King Louis XVIII. and the Marquis d'Avaray."

Bonneville nudged Petit-Pierre with his elbow.

"Did you know King Louis XVIII. and the Marquis d'Avaray?" gasped the astonished old gentleman, looking at Petit-Pierre as if to make sure that he was not laughing at him.

"In my youth, yes; I knew them very well," replied the youth, simply.

"Humph!" said the marquis, "this beats the Dutch!"

They had taken their places at the table, and all the others, Bertha and Mary included, began to attack the formidable repast.

But in vain did the marquis offer his young guest, one after another, all the dishes with which the table was laden. Petit-Pierre declined them all, and said he would be quite content, if his host would permit,

with a cup of tea and a couple of fresh eggs laid by the hens which he had heard cackling so joyously in the morning.

"So far as the fresh eggs are concerned, it's a simple matter," said the marquis, "and Mary will go and get them, all warm from the hennery; but when you come to the tea, the devil take me if I believe there's a bit in the house!"

Mary had not waited for her father's command before rising and starting to execute the commission; but when the marquis expressed his doubt concerning the tea, she stopped, as embarrassed as himself.

It was very clear that the tea was lacking.

Petit-Pierre observed the embarrassment of his hosts.

"Oh," said he, "don't mind about it in the least! M. de Bonneville will be good enough to go and get a few pinches of tea from my travelling-bag."

"From your travelling-bag?"

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre; "as I have contracted the bad habit of drinking tea, I always carry it with me."

He handed the Comte de Bonneville a little key, which he took from a bunch hanging at the end of a golden chain.

The comte left the room hurriedly by one door, while Mary went out the other.

"By the devil!" cried the marquis, swallowing an enormous piece of venison, "you're a regular woman, my young friend; and except for the opinion you expressed just now, which I consider much too profound to have emanated from a female brain, I should almost doubt your sex."

Petit-Pierre smiled.

"Nonsense!" said he; "you shall see me at work, Monsieur le Marquis, when we meet Philippe's sol-

diers. And then, I hope, you will reconsider the unfavorable opinion which I am giving you of myself at this moment."

"What! you will take the field with us?" asked the marquis, more and more amazed.

"I hope so," replied the youth.

"And I," said Bonneville, returning and handing back the key to Petit-Pierre, "I promise you that you will find him always at my side."

"I shall be delighted, my young friend," said the marquis. "But that won't surprise me, after all. God does not mete out courage in proportion to the size of the body to which he gives it. In the great war, I saw one of the ladies who followed M. de Charette manage a pistol very handily and bravely."

At this moment Mary returned. She held the teapot in one hand, and in the other two soft boiled eggs on a plate.

"Thanks, my dear child," said Petit-Pierre, in a tone which reminded M. de Souday of the nobles of the old court; "and a thousand pardons for the trouble I have caused you."

"You were speaking just now of his Majesty Louis XVIII.," said M. de Souday, "and of his culinary ideas; I have often heard it said, apropos of his meals, that he was supremely dainty."

"It's true," said Petit-Pierre, "the good king had a way of eating ortolans and cutlets which was peculiar to him."

"I should say, however," said the marquis, stripping the meat from the bone of a cutlet at one bite, "that there is only one way of eating cutlets."

"That's the way you do it, is it not, Monsieur le Marquis?" said Bonneville, laughingly.

"Yes, faith! And, as for ortolans, when it happens that Bertha and Mary amuse themselves by hunting small game, and bring home, not ortolans to be sure, but larks and titlarks, I take them by the bill, I season them to my taste with pepper and salt, I put them into my mouth whole, and cut off the bill close to the eyes with my teeth. They are fine so! only one person needs two or three dozen."

Petit-Pierre began to laugh, for he was reminded of the story of the Swiss who bet that he could eat a calf six weeks old for his dinner.

"I was wrong in saying that Louis XVIII. had a peculiar way of eating ortolans and cutlets; it would have been more accurate to say a way of cooking them."

"*Dame!*" said the marquis, "I should say that ortolans are cooked on the spit, and cutlets on the toaster."

"True," said Petit-Pierre, evidently amused at the turn the conversation had taken; "but his Majesty, Louis XVIII. improved upon the regular method. As to cutlets, the maître d'hôtel of the Tuileries was careful to cook each one, which was *to have the honor*, as it was said, of being eaten by the king, between two other cutlets, in such manner that the cutlet in the middle would be cooked in the juice of the other two. It was the same with ortolans; each of those which were to have the honor of being eaten by the king was placed inside a thrush, which was itself inserted in a snipe; when the ortolan was cooked, the snipe was uneatable, but the thrush was excellent, and the ortolan beyond description."

"Upon my word, young man," said M. de Souday, leaning back in his chair, and viewing Petit-Pierre with supreme wonder, "one would say that you had seen the

good King Louis XVIII. perform all his gastronomic feats."

"I have seen him," said Petit-Pierre.

"Did you hold an office at court?" the marquis asked with a laugh.

"I was a page," was the reply.

"Indeed, that explains it all," said the marquis. "*Pardieu!* you have seen a good deal considering your age."

"Yes," replied Petit-Pierre with a sigh. "I have seen too much!"

The two girls gazed sympathetically upon the young man.

After careful scrutiny one would have said that those features which appeared at first glance so youthful had seen a considerable number of years, and that misfortune had left its mark upon them.

The marquis made two or three attempts to renew the conversation; but Petit-Pierre, buried in thought, seemed to have said all that he had to say, and whether because he did not hear the various theories advanced by the marquis upon dark meats and white meats, and upon the difference of the juices in wild game and barnyard game, or whether he did not consider it worth while to assent to them, or refute them, he maintained an obstinate silence.

Notwithstanding his taciturnity, when they rose from the table, the marquis, rendered very expansive by the satisfaction of his appetite, was perfectly delighted with his young friend.

They returned to the salon; but Petit-Pierre instead of joining the young ladies and their father and the Comte de Bonneville around the hearth, where a fire was burning which indicated that wood was plentiful at

Souday, owing to the proximity of the forest, — Petit-Pierre, anxious or thoughtful, as you please, went straight to the window and pressed ~~his~~ forehead against the glass.

After a moment or two, during which the marquis was paying the Comte de Bonneville innumerable compliments upon his young companion, the young gentleman's name, uttered in a short, imperative voice, made him start.

It was Petit-Pierre who called him.

He quickly turned and ran to where the young peasant stood.

The latter spoke earnestly to him for several minutes in an undertone as if giving orders. After every sentence, Bonneville bowed as if in token of his assent.

When Petit-Pierre had finished, Bonneville took his hat, bowed, and went out.

Thereupon the youth approached the marquis.

"Monsieur de Souday," said he, "I have promised the Comte de Bonneville that you would not object to his taking one of your horses to visit the châteaux in the neighborhood, and ask the same men with whom you had your controversy this morning, to meet this evening at Souday; he will find them doubtless still together at Saint Philbert. That's why I urged him to make all possible speed."

"But some of these gentlemen," said the marquis, "may perhaps bear me a grudge for the way I talked to them this morning, and may make some demur about coming to my house."

"A command will persuade those whom an invitation would leave in doubt."

"A command from whom?" inquired the wondering marquis.

"From Madame la Duchesse de Berry, from whom M. de Bonneville has full powers. Now, it may be," said Petit-Pierre, with some hesitation, "that you fear that such a meeting at the Château de Souday would have disastrous results for you and your family. In that case, marquis, say the word; the Comte de Bonneville has not gone yet."

"*Corbleu!*" said the marquis, "let him go on the dead run, though he ruin my best horse!"

The words were hardly out of the marquis's mouth, when, as if he had heard them, and was availing himself on the instant of the permission given him, Bonneville passed before the windows of the salon at full speed, rode through the main gate, and galloped away on the Saint Philbert road.

The marquis went to the window to follow him with his eyes, as long as he could, and turned away only when he was lost to sight.

Then he looked for Petit-Pierre, but that youth had disappeared; and the marquis, upon questioning his daughters, was informed that he had gone to his apartment to write letters, as he said.

"A devilish nice little fellow!" remarked the Marquis de Souday.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE VENDEANS OF 1832.

THE Comte de Bonneville returned at five in the afternoon of the same day.

He had seen five of the leading insurgents, and they were to be at the Château de Souday between eight and nine o'clock.

The marquis, always hospitable, ordered the cook to make such arrangements as she chose with the tenants of the barnyard and the contents of the pantry, and to prepare the most abundant supper that could be managed.

The five leaders, whom the comte had seen, and who were to meet in the evening, were Louis Renaud, Pascal, Cœur-de-Lion, Gaspard, and Achille.

Those of our readers who are in any wise familiar with the events of 1832 will easily recognize the individuals in question, who assumed these *noms de guerre*, for the purpose of evading identification by the authorities in case a stray despatch should be intercepted.

In pursuance of the arrangements made by the comte, — Jean Oullier being still absent, to the intense disappointment of the marquis, — the door was entrusted to Mary, with instructions to open only to those who knocked in a certain way.

The drawing-room, with shutters closed and drawn curtains, was to be the meeting-place.

At seven o'clock four persons were waiting in that apartment: the Marquis de Souday, the Comte de Bonneville, Petit-Pierre, and Bertha.

Mary, as we have said, was on duty in a little closet, on the side looking out on the high road, with a barred window, through which she could see who knocked, and be sure of the identity of a visitor before opening the door.

Of the persons in the salon, the most impatient was Petit-Pierre, in whose make-up tranquillity did not seem to be the predominant virtue. Although the clock marked barely half after seven, and the rendez-vous was fixed at eight, he constantly went to the half-open door to listen for some sound which would denote the arrival of one of the gentlemen expected.

At last, just on the stroke of eight, a knocking was heard, and the three raps with the agreed intervals indicated that it was one of them.

"Ah!" said Petit-Pierre, opening the door eagerly.

But the Comte de Bonneville stopped him with his hand, and with a respectful smile.

"You are right," said the young man; and he retired to the darkest corner of the salon.

Almost at the same moment the new-comer appeared in the doorway.

"Monsieur Louis Renaud," said the Comte de Bonneville so loud that Petit-Pierre might hear, and learn from the *nom de guerre* the name which it was assumed to hide.

The Marquis de Souday went to meet Louis Renaud, with great cordiality, because the latter was one of those, who, like himself, believed in the advisability of an immediate resort to arms.

"Come in, come in, my dear comte; you are the first to arrive; that's a good omen."

"Though I am the first to arrive, my dear marquis," said Louis Renaud, "I am sure it is not because I have been any more zealous about coming than my compan-

ions; it's simply that I live nearer, and had n't so far to go."

As he spoke, the gentleman who was announced under the name of Louis Renaud, although clad in the simple garb of a Breton peasant, saluted Bertha with such unexceptionable grace and aristocratic ease of manner, that those two qualities alone would have embarrassed him considerably if it had been essential for him to borrow, even for a moment, the language and deportment of the social caste, whose costume he had borrowed.

Having thus courteously paid his respects to the master of the house and Bertha, it was the Comte de Bonneville's turn. But he, realizing the burning impatience of Petit-Pierre, who, though hidden in his corner, gave token of his presence none the less by motions which the Comte de Bonneville alone seemed able to interpret, bluntly introduced the question.

"My dear comte," he said to Louis Renaud, "you know the extent of my powers; you have read her royal Highness's letter, and you know that, for the moment at least, I am her accredited representative to you. Now, what is your opinion of the situation?"

"My opinion, my dear comte, I told you this morning, but not in just the form perhaps in which I shall tell it here; for here, where I know I am with the ardent adherents of Madame, I may venture to speak the whole truth."

"Yes, the whole truth," said Bonneville; "that is what it is needful for Madame to know; and whatever you say to me, my dear comte, you can have no doubt that it will be as if she heard it herself."

"Very well; in my opinion we should take no steps until the arrival of the maréchal."

"The maréchal," exclaimed Petit-Pierre; "is he not at Nantes?"

Louis Renaud, who had not yet noticed the young peasant, glanced at him when he thus interposed, bowed, and replied,—

“It was not until I returned home to-day that I learned that the maréchal left Nantes on learning the course of events in the South, and that no one knows in what direction he has gone, or what his plans are.”

Petit-Pierre tapped his foot on the floor impatiently.

“Why the maréchal was the soul of the enterprise!” he cried; “his absence will throw cold water on the uprising, and diminish the confidence of the soldiers. In his absence, everybody will be as good as everybody else, and we shall see a repetition among the leaders of those bitter rivalries which were so fatal to the royalist party in the first wars of La Vendée.”

Seeing that Petit-Pierre had entered bodily into the conversation, the Comte de Bonneville effaced himself, giving place to his young comrade who came forward a few steps into the circle of the light shed by the lamps.

Louis Renaud looked in profound amazement at this youth, who was hardly more than a child, and yet spoke with so much assurance and clear-headedness.

“It’s a delay, monsieur,” said he, “that’s all. Have no doubt that as soon as the maréchal is assured of Madame’s presence in La Vendée he will be the first at his post.”

“Did not M. de Bonneville tell you that Madame is on the way, and will be among her friends in a very short time?”

“He did indeed, monsieur, and I can say for myself that the news caused me the greatest joy and satisfaction.”

“Delay! delay!” muttered Petit-Pierre. “I have

always heard, it seems to me, that any rising in this country of yours ought to take place in the first half of May, so that it will be easier to bring into it the farmers who are busy with their farm-work later in the season. Here it is the 14th already, and still we are put off. The leaders are all summoned, are they not?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Louis Renaud, with melancholy gravity. "I must say, further than that, that you cannot safely rely upon any but the leaders. And not even upon all of them, as Monsieur de Souday found out this morning," he added with a sigh.

"What's that you say, monsieur?" cried Petit-Pierre. "Apathy in Vendée, when our friends at Marseilles — and I speak by the card, for I am just from there — are furious with themselves, and ask only for an opportunity to take their revenge!"

A feeble smile played upon the young nobleman's lips.

"You are from the South, monsieur," said he, "although your accent would indicate otherwise."

"True," said Petit-Pierre. "What then?"

"You must not confound the South with the West, monsieur, the Marseillaise with the Vendean. A proclamation stirs the South to frenzy, and the slightest check discourages them utterly. La Vendée, on the other hand — and when you have been in the province some time you will realize the truth of what I say — La Vendée is solemn, unemotional, and taciturn; every plan is discussed there moderately and exhaustively; all the probabilities of success or failure are dealt with one by one; and when the chance of success seems to outweigh the danger of failure, then the Vendean puts forth his hand, says 'yes,' and dies, if need be, in the fulfilment of his promise. But as he knows that 'yes'

or 'no' are for him words of life or death, he is slow to pronounce them."

"But how about the enthusiasm, monsieur?" cried Petit-Pierre.

The young chief smiled.

"Oh, yes! enthusiasm," said he, "I heard of that in my youth; it's a divinity of the last century, which has stepped down from its altar since so many of the promises made to our fathers were broken. Do you know what happened this morning at Saint Philbert?"

"Partly, yes; the marquis told me."

"But after the marquis left?"

"No."

"Well; out of twelve leading men who were to command the twelve divisions, seven protested, in the name of their men, and have probably sent them home before this time; and they did that, all the time declaring that under all circumstances their individual lives were at Madame's service, and their blood ready to flow for her; but, they added, they could not assume the fearful responsibility before God, of leading their peasants into an undertaking which seemed likely to be naught but a bloody failure."

"Must we, then," said Petit-Pierre, "abandon all hope, renounce the idea of a struggle?"

The same sad smile passed over the young man's face.

"All hope, *yes*, perhaps; all idea of a struggle, *no*. Madame sent word to us that the rising would be forwarded by the Directorate at Paris; Madame assured us that it had ramifications in the army; let us make the trial and see! An *émeute* at Paris, or desertions among the troops will perhaps prove her to be in the right. If we attempt nothing in her behalf, Madame will feel convinced, as she takes her departure, that if we had made

the trial, we should have succeeded, and we must not leave Madame in any doubt on that score."

"But, then, suppose we fail?" cried Petit-Pierre.

"Oh! five or six hundred persons will have laid down their lives for nothing, that's all; and it is an excellent thing that a party, even though it fail of success, should set an example of this sort, not only to its own countrymen, but to foreign nations."

"You are not one of those who sent their men home?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"Yes, I am, monsieur; but I am also one of those who have taken an oath to die for her royal Highness. Besides," he continued, "perhaps the die is already cast, and we shall have no other merit than that of following a movement already begun."

"How so?" asked Petit-Pierre, Bonneville, and the marquis in the same breath.

"Shots were exchanged to-day at Montaigu fair."

"And firing is going on at this moment at the ford of the Boulogne," said a strange voice from the doorway, in which a new arrival was standing.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ALARM.

THE personage whom we are about to introduce, who introduced himself, rather, to the salon of the Marquis de Souday, was the commissary General of the Vendean army *in futuro*, who had changed his name, well known at the bar of Nantes, for the pseudonym of Pascal.

He had been abroad several times to confer with Madame, and knew her perfectly well. It was barely two months since he had made his last journey of this description, and had received her royal Highness's commands in exchange for the intelligence he brought her from France.

It was he who had brought back word for La Vendée to be prepared.

"Aha," muttered the Marquis de Souday with a grimace which implied that he did not hold lawyers in the most profound esteem; "M. le Commissaire Général Pascal —"

"Who brings us some news, apparently," said Petit-Pierre, with the evident intention of attracting the newcomer's notice.

At the sound of the voice which uttered these words, the civil dignitary started, and turned towards Petit-Pierre, who made him an imperceptible sign with her eyes and lips, which seemed all sufficient to indicate what he was to do.

"News, yes," said he.

"Good or bad?" queried Louis Renaud.

"Mixed. We will begin with the good."

"What is it?"

"Her royal Highness has passed safely through the southern provinces, and has arrived in Vendée, safe and sound."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the marquis and Louis Renaud together.

"As sure as I am that I see all five of you here in this room, and in good health," replied Pascal. "Now, let us pass to the other news."

"Have you heard anything from Montaigu?" asked Louis Renaud.

"There was fighting there to-day," said Pascal; "a few shots were fired by the National Guard, and a few peasants were killed or wounded."

"How did it happen?" Petit-Pierre inquired.

"Over a row which arose at the fair, and degenerated into an *émeute*."

"Who is in command at Montaigu?" Petit-Pierre was still the questioner.

"A simple captain," was Pascal's reply; "but to-day, on account of the fair, the sub-prefect and the general in command of the military district were there."

"Do you know the general's name?"

"Dermoncourt."

"What sort of a man is this Dermoncourt?"

"In what respect do you mean, monsieur? As a man, as to his opinions, or as to his character?"

"In all three respects."

"He is a man of sixty to sixty-two years, of that iron generation who did all the fighting in the wars of the Revolution and the Empire; he will remain in the saddle night and day, and never give you a moment's rest."

"Good!" said Louis Renaud, laughing; "we will try to tire him out, and as we are only half as old as he, we shall be very unlucky or unskilful if we can't succeed."

"What are his opinions?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"At heart," Pascal replied, "I think he's a Republican."

"Notwithstanding his twelve years of service under the Empire? His colors are fast!"

"There are plenty like him. You remember what Henri IV. said of the Leaguers; 'what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.'"

"And his character?"

"Oh, loyalty itself! He is neither an Amadis nor a Galaor; but he is a Ferragus, and if Madame ever had the ill-luck to fall into his hands —"

"Well, what were you about to say, Monsieur Pascal?" said Petit-Pierre.

"I am a lawyer, monsieur," replied the commissary, "and as a lawyer, I look into all the probabilities of a lawsuit. I say again then, if Madame ever had the ill-luck to fall into the hands of General Dermoncourt, she could judge of his courtesy."

"In that case," said Petit-Pierre, "he's the very man Madame would select for an enemy, sturdy, brave, and loyal. Monsieur, we have a chance — But you spoke of firing at the ford of the Boulogne?"

"I presume that the shots I heard as I came hither were fired there."

"Perhaps it would be well for Bertha to go out and reconnoitre; she will tell us all that is going on."

Bertha rose.

"What!" said Petit-Pierre, "mademoiselle?"

"Why not?" queried the marquis.

"Because I should say it was a man's work, not a woman's!"

"My young friend," said the old gentleman, "in such matters I rely first of all upon myself, then upon Jean Oullier, and after Jean upon Bertha or Mary. I desire to have the honor of remaining with you; that scamp of a Jean Oullier is running around the country, so let Bertha go."

Bertha, thereupon, kept on toward the door; but at the door she met her sister with whom she exchanged a few words in an undertone.

"Here's Mary," said Bertha.

"Ah," said the marquis. "Have you heard any gunshots, little one?"

"Yes, father," said Mary, "there's fighting going on."

"Where is it?"

"At the Saut de Baugé."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; but the shots came from the swamp."

"You see," said the marquis, "that's definite enough. Who is keeping the door for you?"

"Rosine Tinguy."

"Listen!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre.

As he spoke there was a hurried, violent knocking at the door.

"The devil!" exclaimed the marquis; "that's not one of our friends."

They all listened with eager attention.

"Open!" cried a voice, — "open! there's not an instant to lose!"

"It's his voice!" ejaculated Mary.

"His voice!" repeated the marquis; "whose voice?"

"Yes, young Baron Michel's voice," said Bertha, who had also recognized it.

"What the devil is that young milksop doing here?" said the marquis, taking a step toward the door as if to give orders to keep him out.

"Let him come in, marquis, — let him come in!" cried Bonneville. "There is nothing to fear, and I will answer for him."

The words had scarcely left his mouth when a hurried step was heard, rushing toward the salon, and the young baron appeared, pale, gasping for breath, covered with mud, dripping with perspiration, and with just wind enough left to say, —

"Not an instant to lose! fly! they are coming!"

He fell upon his knees, resting one hand on the floor; his breath failed him, he was completely used up. As he had promised Jean Oullier, he had run more than half a league in six minutes.

There was a moment of absolute confusion and bewilderment in the salon.

"To arms!" shouted the marquis.

As he pounced upon his own gun, he pointed to a rack in the corner, which held three or four carbines and hunting rifles.

The Comte de Bonneville and Pascal, as if actuated by the same impulse, threw themselves in front of Petit Pierre to protect him.

Mary darted to the baron to raise him from the floor and give him such help as he might need.

Bertha ran to the window overlooking the forest, and opened it.

They heard then several reports, somewhat nearer, though still at a considerable distance.

"They are at the Viette des Biques," said Bertha.

"Nonsense!" rejoined the marquis; "it's incredible that they should attempt such a place as that!"

"That's where they are, father," said Bertha.

"Yes, yes," gasped Michel, "I saw them; they had torches, and a woman was guiding them; she was first, and the general second."

"Oh, accursed Jean!" said the marquis, "why are n't you here?"

"He is fighting, Monsieur le Marquis," said the baron; "it was he who sent me, not being able to come himself."

"He?" said the marquis.

"But I was on the way, mademoiselle, I was coming of my own accord. I have known since last night that the château was to be attacked, but I was a prisoner. I climbed out of a window on the second —"

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Mary, turning pale.

"Bravo!" said Bertha.

"Messieurs," said Petit-Pierre, coolly, "I think that we must be making up our minds. Shall we fight? In that case we must get our weapons ready, close the doors, and take our posts. Shall we fly? In that case we have even less time to lose, I fancy."

"Let us defend ourselves!" said the marquis.

"Let us fly!" said Bonneville. "When Petit-Pierre is in a place of safety, then we will defend ourselves."

"Well," said Petit-Pierre, "what do you say, comte?"

"I say that nothing is ready, and we cannot fight. Not so, Messieurs?"

"One can always fight," said the youthful, careless voice of a new arrival, speaking half to those within the salon, and half to two other young men who were behind him, and whom he had doubtless met at the door.

"Ah, Gaspard! Gaspard!" cried Bonneville, rushing

up to the new-comer, in whose ear he said a few words.

"Messieurs!" said Gaspard, "the Comte de Bonneville is perfectly right; we must retreat!"

"Is there any secret door, or exit of any sort to your château?" he said to the marquis. "We have no time to lose; the last reports which Achille, Cœur-de-Lion, and myself heard when we were at the door were not more than five hundred yards away."

"Messieurs," said the marquis, "you are in my house; it is for me to assume the whole responsibility. Silence! let every one listen and obey me to-day; my turn to obey will come to-morrow."

Perfect silence ensued.

"Mary," continued the marquis, "close the door of the château, but without barring it, so that it can be opened at the first touch. Bertha, to the subterranean passage without losing an instant! My daughters and I will receive the general and do the honors of the château to him, and to-morrow we will join you, wherever you are; only be sure and let us know where that is."

Mary ran from the room to execute her father's order, while Bertha, motioning to Petit-Pierre, went out by the other door, crossed the courtyard, entered the chapel, took two candles from the altar, lighted them with a lamp, placed them in the hands of Bonneville and Pascal, and pressing a spring which caused the front of the altar to revolve, disclosed a staircase leading to the vaults, formerly used as a place of burial for the lords of Souday.

"You can't possibly lose your way," said Bertha; "you will find a door at the end, and the key is in the lock. The door opens into the fields."

Petit-Pierre took Bertha's hand, pressed it warmly,

and darted into the subterranean passage behind Bonneville and Pascal, who went ahead to light the others.

Louis Renaud, Achille, Cœur-de-Lion, and Gaspard followed Petit-Pierre.

Bertha closed the door upon them.

She had noticed that Baron Michel was not among the fugitives.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MY COMPÈRE LORiot.

THE Marquis de Souday, having followed the fugitives with his eyes until they disappeared within the chapel, uttered one of those exclamations which indicate that a considerable load has been removed from the mind, and returned to the hall.

But instead of going from the hall to the salon, he went into the kitchen.

Contrary to all his customs, and to the vast amazement of the cook, he went to the ovens, anxiously lifted the cover off of every stew-pan, made sure that noné of the ragout was sticking to the bottom, pulled the spits a little away from the fire, so that the joints should not be disgraced by getting burned at the last moment, went out into the hall again, and thence into the dining-room, inspected the bottles, doubled their number, looked to see if the table was laid in proper shape, and finally returned to the salon, content with what he had seen.

He found there his two daughters, the front door having been left in charge of Rosine, whose sole instructions were to raise the latch at the first blow of the knocker.

The girls were seated at opposite corners of the fireplace. Mary was restless, Bertha pensive; both were thinking of Michel.

Mary supposed that he had followed the Comte de Bonneville and Petit-Pierre, and was much moved by

the thought of the fatigue he would incur, and the risks he was running.

Bertha, for her part, was intoxicated by the keen ecstasy which follows the revelation of the love of the being whom one loves. It seemed to her that she had read in the young baron's looks that which made it certain that it was for her that the poor, timid, bashful boy had conquered his weakness and faced real danger. She measured the extent of the passion which she imagined him to feel for her by the revolution which that passion had accomplished in the young man's character. She was building thousands of castles in Spain, and reproaching herself bitterly for not having forced him to return to the château when she saw that he was not following those whom his devotion had saved.

Then she smiled; for suddenly a thought came into her mind. He had remained in the château. He had hidden in some corner to see her in private; and if she should venture into the courtyard or the park, she would see him rise up before her, and hear him say, —

“See what I am capable of doing, just for a glance from you!”

The marquis had just taken his seat in his easy-chair, and had not had time to observe the absorption of his daughters, — which he might have attributed to almost any other cause than the real one, — when there was a knock at the door.

The marquis jumped, not that he did not expect to hear a knock, but because the one in question was not such an one as he expected to hear. It was modest, almost apologetic, and therefore had nothing military about it.

“Oho!” said the marquis, “what’s that?”

"Some one knocked, I think," said Bertha, aroused from her reverie.

"Yes, just one knock," said Mary.

The marquis shook his head, as who should say, "That's not what I'm waiting for." But as if he thought that at such a time he ought to look out for everything himself, he decided to go and see what it was.

So he left the salon, crossed the hall, and went out upon the stoop.

Instead of the sabres and bayonets which he expected to see glistening in the darkness, instead of the warlike, mustachioed faces whose acquaintance he expected to make, the marquis saw nothing in the world but the top of an enormous blue cotton umbrella coming on toward him, point foremost, climbing the steps one by one.

As this umbrella, which marched steadily onward like the callapash of a tortoise, threatened to put his eye out with the point which protruded from its centre like the point of an ancient shield, the marquis lifted the outer circle of the shield and found himself face to face with a martin's muzzle, surmounted by two little shining points, like carbuncles, and wearing a very high-crowned, narrow-brimmed hat which had been brushed and re-brushed so often that it shone in the darkness as if it had been varnished.

"By the thousand devils of hell!" cried M. de Souday; "it's my *compère* Lorient!"

"Ready to pay you his respects, if you deem him worthy the privilege," said the last comer in a high-pitched voice, which became sepulchral, owing to its owner's attempt to render it wheedling.

"You are very welcome at Souday, Master Lorient,"

said the marquis, good-humoredly, and as if he anticipated some entertainment from the presence of him whom he welcomed so cordially. "I expect a good deal of company this evening; and in your capacity as the host's notary, you can assist me to entertain them. Come and make your bow to the young ladies."

The old gentleman, with a bearing which showed how conscious he was of the distance between a Marquis de Souday and a village notary, preceded his guest to the salon.

It is true that Master Loriot made so much bother about wiping his feet on the rug which lay at the door of that sanctuary, that the mark of courtesy, which the marquis might have shown by allowing him to enter the room first, would have become an unpleasant task.

Let us take advantage of the moment occupied by the notary in closing his umbrella and wiping his feet to sketch his portrait, if the task is not beyond our capacity.

Master Loriot, notary of Machecoul, was a little fellow, thin and meagre, and appearing half as spare again as he really was by the habit he had adopted of bending himself double when he spoke, and assuming an attitude of most profound respect.

A long, pointed nose served him for a face. In developing that one feature beyond all measure, Nature had chosen to recoup herself on the other features, and had measured out to him, with incredible stinginess, whatever did not pertain to the salient part of his countenance; so that it was necessary to look at Master Loriot at very short range, and for a long while, in order to discover that he had eyes and a mouth like other men. But when one had made that discovery, one noticed that the eyes were full of animation, and that the mouth did not lack expression.

In truth, Master Lorient, — or Compère Lorient, as he was called by M. de Souday, who in his capacity of enthusiastic huntsman had some little ornithological knowledge,¹ — Compère Lorient, we say, fulfilled all the promises of his physiognomical prospectus. He was clever enough to squeeze thirty thousand francs out of a position in which his predecessors had succeeded, only with great difficulty, in making both ends meet.

To reach this result, looked upon as impossible up to that time, M. Lorient had made men, not the Code, the subject of his studies, and had come to the conclusion that pride and vain-glory were their predominant qualities. He had, consequently, sought to render himself serviceable to those two vices, and had soon become necessary to those who were ruled by them.

In Master Lorient, by reason of this system of his, courtesy degenerated into obsequiousness. He did not bow, he prostrated himself; and, like the Indian fakirs, he had bent his body so much and so often that he had literally become accustomed to that position. He was a parenthesis, always open, in which were enclosed the titles of his clients, which he repeated in every phrase with inexhaustible variety. Were his interlocutor a baron or a knight or a simple gentleman, the notary never spoke to him except in the third person. However, his gratitude for such condescending kindness as was shown him was both humble and exuberant. And as he also manifested exaggerated devotion for the interests which were entrusted to him, he had succeeded in winning so many eulogiums, that he had gradually acquired a very considerable *clientèle* among the nobility of the neighborhood.

¹ *Compère Lorient* is the French name for the gold-finch or gold hammer.

The thing which had contributed more than anything else to Master Lorient's success in the department of Loire-Inférieure, and in the neighboring departments, too, to a less degree, was the exaltation of his political opinions.

He was one of those of whom it might be said that he was "more royalist than the king himself."

His little gray eye sparkled when he heard the name of a Jacobin; and, in his eyes, all the liberal factions from M. de Châteaubriand to M. de Lafayette were Jacobins.

He had never chosen to recognize the July Monarchy; and he never spoke of Louis Philippe otherwise than as "M. le Duc d'Orléans," not even bestowing upon him the title of Royal Highness which Charles X. gave him.

Master Lorient was one of the most frequent visitors at the Château de Souday.

It was part of his policy to parade his very deep respect for this illustrious remnant of the old social system, — a system which had all his regret; and he carried his respect so far as to agree to certain loans, on which the marquis, very careless, as we have said, in money matters, regularly neglected to pay the interest.

The marquis cordially welcomed his *compère* Lorient. In the first place, out of deference to said loans; in the second place, because the strain of pride in the old gentleman was no more insensible to flattery than it is in other men; and lastly, because the strained relations between the lord of Souday and his neighbors made him very lonely, and he was delighted with anything which varied his monotonous existence.

When the little notary was certain that his shoes retained no particle of dirt, he entered the salon.

He bowed again to the marquis, who had already seated himself, and began to compliment the young ladies.

But the marquis did not give him time to finish his compliments.

"Lorient," said he, "I am always charmed to see you."

The notary bowed to the floor.

"But you will allow me to ask you, will you not," continued the marquis, "what brings you to this desert of ours at half-past nine at night, and in such weather? To be sure, when one has an umbrella like yours, the sky is always blue."

Lorient thought he ought not to let the marquis's joke pass without an appreciative laugh and a murmur of, —

"Oh! Very good! very good!"

Then he replied, directly.

"This is it," said he. "I was at the Château de la Logerie, which I left very late, having gone there in response to an order, which I did not receive till two o'clock, to take some money to the proprietress of the château aforesaid. I was returning on foot, as my custom is, when I heard in the forest sounds of evil augury, which confirmed to my mind what I already knew of the trouble at Montaigu. I was apprehensive of falling in with the soldiers of the Duc d'Orléans if I went on, and I thought that M. le Marquis would condescend to afford me shelter for the night."

At the name of La Logerie, Bertha and Mary pricked up their ears like two war-horses who suddenly hear the blast of a bugle in the distance.

"You come from La Logerie?" said the marquis.

"As I have had the honor to tell M. le Marquis," replied Master Lorient.

"Well! well! well! We have already had one visitor from La Logerie this evening."

"The young baron, perhaps?" said the notary.

"Yes."

"He's just the man I'm seeking."

"Loriot," said the marquis, "I am amazed to see you, whom I look upon as a man with solid convictions; I am amazed to see you so demean yourself as to couple with the name of these Michels a title which ordinarily you hold in respect."

As the marquis uttered this sentence, with an accent of the utmost disdain, Bertha became crimson, and the color fled from Mary's cheeks.

The old gentleman did not observe the effect his words produced upon them; but it did not escape the little gray eye of the notary. He was about to speak when M. de Souday signified to him, with a motion of his hand, that he had not finished.

"Then again," he continued, "why do you, *compère*, whom we always treat kindly and as a friend, think it necessary to resort to a subterfuge in order to get into our house?"

"Monsieur le Marquis —" stammered Loriot.

"You came here in search of Michel, did you not? Nothing better than that! But why lie about it?"

"Will M. le Marquis deign to accept my most humble apology? The mother of this young man, whom I was compelled to accept as a client because he is a legacy from my predecessor, is very anxious. At the risk of breaking his neck, her son got out of a window on the second floor and made his escape, in contempt of the maternal wishes; so that Madame Michel urged me —"

"Aha!" said the marquis; "did he do all that?"

"Literally, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Well, that reconciles me to him. Not altogether, you understand; but a little."

"If M. le Marquis could tell me where I should be likely to find the young man," said Lorient, "I would take him back to La Logerie."

"Aha! so far as that's concerned, I don't know how nor where he vanished! Do you know, you girls?" asked the marquis of his daughters.

Bertha and Mary both shook their heads.

"You see, my poor *compère*," said the marquis, "that we can't help you at all. But why did Mother Michel shut her son up?"

"It would seem," replied the notary, "that young Michel, hitherto so mild, so tractable, and obedient, has suddenly fallen in love."

"Aha! he has taken the bit in his teeth," said the marquis; "I thought so. Well, *Compère Lorient*, if your advice is asked, tell the mother to give him the rein and plenty of room; that's much better than the martingale. From what little I have seen of him, I should say he was a good enough little devil at bottom."

"An excellent heart, Monsieur le Marquis, and an only son, too; more than a hundred thousand livres income!" said the notary.

"Humph!" said the marquis, "if that's all he has, he'll find it will go very little way toward redeeming the iniquities of the filthy name he bears."

"Father," cried Bertha, while Mary contented herself with a sigh, "you forget the service he did us this evening!"

"Aha!" thought Lorient, looking at the lovely girl, "can the baronne be right? A fine contract that would be to draw up!"

Thereupon he began to figure up what a marriage contract between Baron Michel de la Logerie and Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday would be worth to him in the way of fees.

"You are right, my child," said the marquis; "so let us leave Lorient to hunt for Mother Michel's kitten, and not bother our heads about him to-day. Do you propose to continue your search, Monsieur Notary?" he asked.

"Monsieur le Marquis, if you would deign to allow me, I should prefer —"

"Just now you gave me as an excuse your fear of meeting the soldiers," interposed the marquis; "so you're afraid of them, are you? *Morbleu!* what does that mean? You, one of us!"

"I am not afraid," retorted Lorient; "M. le Marquis may believe me. But these cursed Blues cause me such bitter aversion that when I see one of their uniforms my stomach rebels and I can eat nothing for twenty-four hours."

"That explains your thinness, *compère*; but the saddest part of it is that it forces me to turn you out of doors."

"M. le Marquis is pleased to joke at the expense of his humble servant."

"Not in the least. I simply don't want to cause your death, *compère*."

"How so?"

"If the sight of one soldier causes you twenty-four hours of inability to eat, you must surely die of hunger on the spot if you are under the same roof with a regiment for a whole night."

"A regiment?"

"Precisely; I have invited a regiment to sup at Souday this evening, and my friendship for you, *compère*, compels me to turn you out on short order. But go somewhat cautiously; for the villains, if they see you running through the fields — I mean the woods — at

such an hour, may very well take you for what you are not, — I mean for what you are."

"Well?"

"Why, in that case, they will not fail to honor you with a few shots, and the guns of M. le Duc d'Orléans' soldiers are loaded with ball."

The notary turned as white as a sheet, and mumbled a few incoherent words.

"Come, make up your mind! You have your choice, — to die of hunger or by a bullet. You have no time to lose, for now I can hear the marching step of a whole troop. And listen! that's the general knocking, in all probability."

In truth, the knocker did sound, in vigorous fashion this time, as suited the character and quality of the guest whose arrival it announced.

"In the company of M. le Marquis," said Lorient, "I feel myself sufficiently strong to overcome my repugnance, invincible though it seems."

"Good! Take this torch, then, and come to meet my guests."

"Your guests? Verily, Monsieur le Marquis, I cannot believe —"

"Come on, *Thomas* Lorient! You can see now, and believe later on."

Thereupon the marquis, taking a torch himself, went out upon the stoop.

Bertha and Mary followed him, Mary deep in thought, Bertha anxiously, and both looking into the darkest corners of the courtyard to see if they could not discover somewhere the man who was constantly in their thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEREIN THE GENERAL EATS A DINNER WHICH
WAS NOT PREPARED FOR HIM.

IN accordance with the instructions of the marquis transmitted by Mary to Rosine, the outer gate was thrown open to the soldiers upon the very first blow of the knocker; whereupon they took possession of the courtyard, and lost no time in surrounding the house.

As the old general was alighting from his horse he espied the two torch-bearers, and by their side, half in shadow and half in the light, the two girls.

The whole party came forward with an air of affability and cordiality which took him completely by surprise.

"Upon my word, general," cried the marquis, going down as far as the lowest step to show his respect for the old soldier, "I had almost abandoned all hope of seeing you — this evening, at least."

"You had abandoned hope, did you say, Monsieur le Marquis?" exclaimed the general, dumfounded by such a beginning.

"I had abandoned all hope of seeing you, I say again. What time did you leave Montaigne? About seven o'clock?"

"At seven, precisely."

"As I said! I figured that you would need a little more than two hours for the journey; and so I expected you from quarter to half after nine; but here it is after ten! I was just saying to myself: '*Mon Dieu!* can

anything have happened to deprive me of the honor of entertaining so valiant and estimable an officer? ”

“ So you were expecting me, monsieur? ”

“ *Pardieu!* I’ll be bound it was that infernal Pont-Farcy ford that delayed you. What an abominable neighborhood this is, general! Brooks, which become impassable torrents after the least rain; roads!—they call them roads, but I call them quagmires. However, you must know something about them, for I fancy you had some little difficulty in crossing that accursed Saut de Bauge, a sea of mud, where one sinks in up to the waist, if one is fortunate enough not to get in over head and all! But confess that all those are nothing compared with the Viette des Biques, where, even in the enthusiastic days of my youth when I was mad over hunting, I never dared to go without shuddering. Really, general, when I think of all the trouble and weariness which the honor you do me must have cost you, I don’t know how to express my gratitude.”

The general saw that he had to deal, for the moment, with a cleverer than himself, and he determined to digest with good grace the dish which the marquis offered him.

“ Be assured, Monsieur le Marquis,” he replied, “ that I regret extremely to have kept you waiting for me, and that I am hardly to blame for the delay. In any event I will strive to profit by the lesson you have taught me, and another time, for all your fords and bogs and goat-paths, I will make it a point to time my arrival according to the strictest rules of politeness.”

At this moment an officer came up to the general, to receive his commands relative to searching the château.

“ It’s no use, my dear captain,” said the general. “ Did n’t you hear our host say that we are too late? ”

That means that there is nothing for us to do, for we shall find everything in order in the château."

"How's that? how's that?" said the marquis; "in order or not, my château is entirely at your service, general; use it, pray, as if it were your own."

"That is offered with too good a grace to allow me to refuse," said the general, with a bow.

"Oh! how thoughtless you are, young women!" exclaimed M. de Souday, turning to his daughters: "why did you not remind me that I was keeping these gentlemen standing at the door, and in such weather, too! people who have been through the Pont-Farcy ford! Come in, general, come in, gentlemen, pray! I have had a rousing fire started in the drawing-room, where you can dry your clothes, which the Boulogne must have made quite uninhabitable."

"How can I ever repay your courtesy?" said the general, biting his mustaches and not sparing his lip altogether.

"Oh! you're a man sure to repay it, general!" rejoined the marquis, going before the officers to light their path, while the little notary modestly illuminated the rear of the procession. "But permit me," he continued, placing the candlestick on the chimney-piece, a manœuvre which Master Lorient imitated,—"permit me to go through a formality with which I ought perhaps to have begun, and to present to you my daughters, Mesdemoiselles Bertha and Mary de Souday."

"Faith, marquis," said the general, gallantly, "it's well worth one's while to risk taking cold in crossing the ford of Pont-Farcy, sinking out of sight in the Saut de Bauge, or breaking one's neck on the Viette des Biques, for a sight of such charming faces!"

"Well, young ladies," said the marquis, "suppose

you turn those fine eyes of yours to some account by making sure that our dinner, after having had to wait so long for these gentlemen, does not keep them waiting."

"Truly, marquis," said Dermoncourt, with a glance at his officers, "we are embarrassed by your kindness, and our gratitude —"

"Is quite offset by the diversion your visit affords us. You can understand, general, that I, who am accustomed to the charming faces which you compliment so handsomely, I, who am, moreover, their father, sometimes find life at my paltry little castle very dull and monotonous; fancy my delight, then, when a little bird of my acquaintance whispered in my ear, 'General Dermoncourt left Montaigu with his staff at seven o'clock to make a call at the Château de Souday.'"

"Oho! it was a little bird who told you, was it?"

"To be sure! Don't you know that there is one in every château and every hut in this region? So, you see, the prospect of the delightful evening that lay before me, general, renewed my youth as it hasn't been renewed for a weary while; I put everybody at work, laid my poultry-house under contribution, stirred up Mesdemoiselles de Souday, and kept my *compère*, Lorient, the notary of Machecoul, here to afford him the pleasure of your acquaintance. In fact, damn me! I put my own hand to the work; and between us all, by hook and by crook, we finally succeeded in preparing the dinner which awaits you, as well as that which will be served to your men, whom I was very careful not to overlook, being an old soldier myself."

"You have seen service, then, Monsieur le Marquis?" Dermoncourt asked.

"Not in the same ranks as yourself, perhaps; so,

instead of saying that I have seen service, I will say simply that I have fought."

"In this region?"

"Precisely! Under Charette."

"Aha!"

"I was his aide-de-camp."

"In that case, we have met before, marquis."

"Really?"

"Yes; I made the campaigns of 1795 and 1796 in Vendée."

"Bravo! I am indeed overjoyed!" cried the marquis.

"At dessert, we will talk over all our youthful exploits. Ah, general," continued the old gentleman, with a melancholy note in his voice, "in both camps alike, those who can talk over those campaigns are beginning to be few and far between! But here come the jades to announce that dinner demands our attention. General, will you give your arm to one of them? The captain will escort the other. Gentlemen," said he to the other officers, "kindly follow the general to the dining-room."

They took their places at table, the general between Bertha and Mary, the marquis with an officer on either hand.

Master Lorient seated himself beside Bertha; he had strong hopes that he might be able, during the meal, to put a word in her ear about young Michel. He had quite decided, so far as he was concerned, that the contract should be drawn up in his study.

For some moments nothing was heard save the rattling of plates and clinking of glasses; every one was too fully occupied to talk.

The officers, emulating the example of their general, reconciled themselves complacently to the unexpected denouement of their expedition.

The marquis, who ordinarily dined at five, and was thus six hours behind-hand, was busily making amends to his stomach for the long delay. Mary and Bertha, deep in thought, were not sorry to have an excuse for silence in the repulsion which the tricolored cockades inspired in their breasts.

The general was evidently cogitating how he might have his revenge.

He understood very well that M. de Souday had been warned of his approach; trained in warfare of the Vendean variety he knew how easily and quickly messages were transmitted from one village to another. Embarrassed at first by the spontaneously cordial reception accorded him by M. de Souday, he gradually recovered his *sang-froid*; and resuming his habit of minute observation, he found in everything that met his eye,—in his host's cordiality as well as in the bounteousness of the feast, which was much too fine to have been prepared for the consumption of foes,—something which tended to confirm his suspicions. But being endowed with that degree of patience which every successful hunter of man or beast ought to possess, and being certain that in the darkness it would be absurd to undertake a pursuit, — if the illustrious prey he was seeking had taken flight, as everything seemed to indicate,— he determined to postpone serious investigations until later, and meanwhile to take careful note of everything which happened in his neighborhood.

He was the first to break the silence.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he said, raising his glass, "the choice of a toast would be as difficult for you as for us; but there is one which will embarrass no one, and which ought to take precedence over all others. Allow me to propose the health of Mesdemoiselles de Souday,

thanking them heartily for having joined in the courteous reception with which you have honored us."

"My sister and myself thank you, Monsieur le Général," said Bertha, "and we are very happy that we were able to gratify our father by extending a welcome to you."

"Which means," rejoined the general, smiling, "that you are agreeable to us only by order, and that our gratitude is all due to M. le Marquis. All right! I admire your soldierly bluntness, which would bring me from the camp of your admirers into that of your friends, if I thought that one with the cockade I wear would be admitted there."

"Your praise of my out-spokenness encourages me, monsieur," said Bertha, "so that I venture to confess to you that your colors are not those which I love best to see upon my friends; but if you are really ambitious of that title, I gladly grant it, in the hope that there will come a day when you can wear mine."

"General," said the marquis, scratching his ear, "your reflection was perfectly just; how can I, without compromising either of us, respond to your graceful compliment to my daughters? Have you a wife?"

The general thought he would embarrass his host.

"No," said he.

"A sister?"

"No."

"A mother perhaps?"

"Yes," said the general, as if he had been lying in wait for the marquis at that point; "I have France, the common mother of us all."

"Bravo! I drink to France! and may the eight centuries of glory which she owes to her kings be indefinitely prolonged!"

"And permit me to add," said the general, "the half-century of liberty which she owes to her children!"

"That is more than an addition," said the marquis; "it's a modification.

"By my faith," he cried, after a moment's silence, "I accept the toast; white or tricolor, France is still France!"

All the guests raised their glasses, and even Compère Loriot, drawn on by the example of the marquis, emptied his glass to the toast proposed by the master of the house as modified by the general.

Once started upon that slope, and washed down with abundance of good wine, the conversation assumed such erratic phases that Bertha and Mary realized before the dinner was two thirds done that they could not follow it until dessert was served; so they quietly left the table and went into the drawing-room.

Master Loriot, who seemed to have come to see them quite as much as to see the marquis, at once rose and followed them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHEREIN MASTER LORIOT'S CURIOSITY IS NOT
PRECISELY SATISFIED.

MASTER LORIOT, as we said, at once followed the example set by the young ladies, and leaving the marquis and his guests to revive at their leisure their memories of the "war of the giants," he softly rose from the table and glided into the drawing-room.

He came forward, bowing continuously, and rubbing his hands contentedly.

"Ah," said Bertha, "you seem well pleased with something or other, Monsieur le Notaire."

"Young ladies," replied Master Lorient, in an undertone, "I did my best to second the stratagem of Monsieur your father. I hope that if occasion should arise you will not refuse to bear witness to my coolness and aplomb."

"What stratagem are you referring to, dear Monsieur Lorient?" inquired Mary, with a laugh; "Neither Bertha nor myself has the slightest idea what you mean."

"*Mon Dieu!*" replied the notary, "I have no idea either; but I thought that M. le Marquis must have some very potent and weighty reasons for treating like old friends — indeed, better than he sometimes treats old friends — the frightful wretches whom he now has about his table; the assiduous attentions with which he overwhelms the minions of the usurper seem so extraordinary to me that I fancied they had some object."

"What, for instance?" asked Bertha.

"Why, to inspire them with such a feeling of security that they would neglect the proper precautions, and to take advantage of their carelessness to make them undergo the fate —"

"Well, the fate —?"

"The fate of —" said the notary.

"The fate of whom?"

He passed his hand significantly across his throat.

"Of Holofernes, perhaps?" suggested Bertha, laughing heartily.

"Precisely," said Master Lorient.

Mary joined her sister in her explosion of unrestrained mirth. The little notary's supposition amused them both beyond expression.

"You allotted the *rôle* of Judith to us, I take it?" asked Bertha, who was the first to call a halt to her hilarity.

"*Dame!* young ladies —"

"Monsieur Lorient, if my father were to hear you he might be angry to learn that you supposed him capable of being guilty of such conduct, which is a little too biblical, to my mind; but, never fear, we will not mention it to him or to the general, who would, for his part, certainly be little flattered by your enthusiastic reception of our fancied devotion."

"Young ladies," rejoined Master Lorient, "forgive me if my political ardor and my abhorrence for all the adherents of those damnable doctrines carry me a little too far."

"I forgive you, Monsieur Lorient," replied Bertha, who had the most to forgive, because her frank and determined demeanor had rendered her more liable to suspicion, "I forgive you; and to prevent your falling

into any more such mistakes, I propose to enlighten you as to the situation. Know then, that General Dermoncourt, whom you look upon as anti-Christ, came to the château purely and simply to make such a search as they have been making in the neighboring châteaux."

"Well, in that case," demanded the little notary, becoming more and more confused, "why treat them with — upon my word, I must say it — with so much ceremony and distinction? The law is explicit."

"The law?"

"Yes; it forbids all magistrates, civil and military officers intrusted with the execution of judicial process, to seize, appropriate, or carry away any other articles than those named in said process. What are these fellows doing with the food and drink of all sorts which they found upon the board of M. le Marquis de Souday? They are *ap-pro-pri-a-ting* them!"

"But I should say, Monsieur Lorient," said Mary, "that my father is at liberty to invite whom he pleases to sit at his table."

"Even those who come to put in execution the behests of an odious, tyrannical power, and who represent that power in his house? Certainly, mademoiselle; but you must permit me to look upon it as something quite out of the ordinary, and to suppose that it has some cause or some purpose."

"That is to say, Monsieur Lorient, that you smell a secret which you are simply trying to find out."

"Oh, mademoiselle —"

"Very well, I will, then, disclose it to you, dear Monsieur Lorient, for I know that you can be depended upon; but only on condition, however, that you in return tell me how it happened that being in quest of M. Michel de la Logerie, you came straight to the Château de Souday."

Bertha uttered these words in a firm voice, and the notary listened to them with much more embarrassment than she felt. Mary went to her sister's side, passed her arm through hers, leaned her head on Bertha's shoulder, and awaited Master Lorient's reply with a curiosity which she did not seek to hide.

"Well, since you desire to know why, mademoiselle —"

Here the notary paused, as if to be encouraged to proceed; whereupon Bertha proceeded to encourage him with a nod.

"I came here," continued Lorient, "because Madame la Baronne de la Logerie mentioned the Château de Souday as the place to which it was very probable that her son would go when he made his escape."

"Upon what did Madame de la Logerie base her supposition, pray?" asked Bertha, with the same inquiring look, and the same firm voice.

"Mademoiselle," replied the notary, in growing confusion, "after what I said just now to your father, I don't know that I shall dare to go on to the end, notwithstanding the reward you have offered for my frankness."

"Why not, Monsieur le Notaire?" continued Bertha, with undisturbed serenity. "Would you like me to help you? Is it because she thinks that the object of her son's affection is at the Château de Souday?"

"It is exactly that, mademoiselle."

"Good! But what I wanted to know, and what I insist upon knowing, is Madame de la Logerie's opinion touching that affection."

"Her opinion is not altogether favorable to it, mademoiselle," replied the notary; "that I must confess."

"There's one point, then, upon which my father and the baronne are in accord," laughed Bertha.

"But then," continued the notary, significantly, "M. Michel will be of age in a few months, and consequently free to act as he chooses, — master of his immense fortune —"

"Free to act as he chooses?" said Bertha; "so much the better! That may help him."

"In what, mademoiselle?"

"Why, to rehabilitate the name he bears, and to wipe away the unpleasant reminiscences of his father in the country. As for the fortune, if it were I whom M. Michel honors with his regard, I would advise him to make such use of it that there would soon be no name more honorable and more honored than his from one end of the province to the other."

"Just what would you advise him to do, mademoiselle?" asked the notary, in amazement.

"To return the fortune to those from whom his father is said to have taken it, — to restore to their rightful owners the national estates which M. Michel purchased."

"But if he did that," exclaimed the bewildered notary, "the poor fellow who had the honor of loving you would ruin himself!"

"What would that matter, if he retained the esteem of all people and the affection of her who advised the sacrifice?"

At this moment Rosine put her head in at the door, and said, without addressing either Mary or Bertha particularly, —

"Mademoiselle, will you come here a moment, please?"

Bertha desired to continue the conversation with the notary. She was eager for information as to Madame de la Logerie's hostile feeling toward her, — even more eager, perhaps, than she was concerning the son's feel-

ing for her. In short, she was very glad to discuss, no matter how vaguely, the plans which had for some time formed the unvarying theme of her meditations; so she asked Mary to go and see what was wanted.

Mary, on her side, was sorry to leave the room. She was terrified to see how far Bertha's love for Michel had developed within a few days; every word that her sister uttered echoed ominously in her heart. She believed herself, to be sure, that Michel's love was absolutely and entirely her own, and she trembled with terror to think of Bertha's despair when she should find how cruelly she had deceived herself. Then, too, despite her boundless affection for Bertha, love had already poured into her heart a slight infusion of that selfishness which is the invariable accompaniment of love; so that Mary, from another point of view, was very happy in her own belief. She secretly allotted to herself the *rôle* which her sister was sketching for the beloved wife of Michel. Thus it was that Bertha had to tell her a second time to go and see why Rosine had called one of them.

"Come, darling, won't you go?" said she, putting her lips to Mary's forehead. "Go, that's a good girl, and look after a room for M. Lorient at the same time; for, in all this turning upside down, I'm afraid nobody has thought about a place for him to lay his head."

Mary was used to obeying, and she obeyed. Of the two, hers was the mild and yielding nature.

She found Rosine at the door.

"What do you want of us?" she asked.

Rosine made no reply, — as if she were afraid of being overheard in the dining-room, where the marquis was telling the story of Charette's last day. She took Mary by the arm, and led her to the stairway at the other end of the hall.

"Mademoiselle," said she, "he's hungry."

"He's hungry?" Mary repeated.

"Yes; he just this minute told me so."

"Whom are you talking about? Who's hungry?"

"He, — the poor boy!"

"Who's he?"

"Why, M. Michel."

"What! M. Michel here?"

"Did n't you know it?"

"Why, no indeed!"

"Two hours ago about — after mademoiselle your sister returned to the drawing-room, a little before the soldiers came — he appeared in the kitchen."

"Then he did n't go away with Petit-Pierre?"

"Apparently not."

"You say that he came to the kitchen?"

"Yes; he was so tired that it was pitiful to see him. 'Monsieur Michel,' — that's what I said to him, — 'pray why don't you go to the drawing-room?' '*Dame!* my dear Rosine,' he replied, in his gentle voice, 'because no one asked me to stay.' Then he said he was going to Machecoul for the night; for as to going back to La Logerie, he would n't do it for anything in the world. It seems that his mother wants to drag him off to Paris. I refused to hear of his travelling around in the middle of the night."

"You did just right, Rosine. Where is he now?"

"I put him in the tower chamber; but as the soldiers have taken possession of the ground floor of the tower, there is no way of getting to him except by the corridor at the end of the granary; and I came to ask you for the key."

Mary's first impulse — the good one — was to tell her sister; but it was soon succeeded by a second. And

that, it must be confessed, was less generous; it was to see Michel first, and alone.

Rosine, moreover, furnished her with an excuse for following her second impulse.

"Here's the key," said Mary.

"Oh, mademoiselle," said Rosine, "come with me, I beg you! There are so many men in the château that I don't dare to be alone, and I should die with fright to go way up there; but everybody will respect you as the daughter of the marquis."

"How about the provisions?"

"Here they are."

"Where?"

"In this basket."

"Very well, then; come!"

And Mary darted up the staircase with the fleetness of one of the kids which she hunted among the cliffs of Machecoul forest.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ROOM IN THE LITTLE TOWER.

UPON reaching the second floor, Mary stopped before the apartment which Jean Oullier occupied. The key she required was there.

Then she opened a door which led from that floor to the winding staircase, by which the upper part of the tower was reached. She ran quickly up this staircase several stairs ahead of Rosine, who was somewhat embarrassed by her basket. The ascent was by no means free from danger, for every part of this half-abandoned tower was then in a characteristic state of decay and dilapidation.

It was at the top of this tower, in a little room next the roof, that Rosine and the cook, after due deliberation, had stowed away the young Baron de la Logerie.

Excellent as the intentions of the two worthy girls undoubtedly were, the result of their efforts was by no means proportioned to them; for it was impossible to conceive a more wretched place of shelter,—a place, in short, where it was so utterly out of the question to obtain rest from the most trifling fatigue.

This room, in short, was used by Jean Oullier as a store-room for his vegetable seeds, and for the tools which he used in the exercise of his functions as Master Jacques. The walls were literally lined with beans, cabbages, lettuces, and onions run to seed, of almost

every known variety, and all exposed to the air that the seeds might acquire the proper degree of ripeness and dryness. Unfortunately, all these botanic specimens, during the six months they had been awaiting the proper moment to be placed in the ground, had absorbed such a quantity of dust that at the least movement of any sort in the narrow room millions of particles rose from the leguminous mass and thickened the atmosphere beyond endurance.

The only furniture in the place was a joiner's board, — not a very comfortable seat, as any one can see. And Michel, who had made up his mind to accept it as such, soon concluded to exchange it for a bag of oats of a new variety, the rarity of which had procured for it the honors of the cabinet of precious seeds. He sat down on the middle of the bag; and there, notwithstanding some drawbacks, — what seat is so comfortable as to be free from them? — he found at least sufficient elasticity to give him some slight relief from the weariness with which his limbs were aching.

But he soon tired of his seat upon that shifting and prickly sofa. When Guérin upset him into the stream, a considerable quantity of very moist mud had adhered to the surface of his clothes; and the dampness eventually penetrated to his skin. Consequently, his very brief stay before the kitchen fire profited him little; and he found himself more impressed than ever with the humidity of that mud. So he began to pace up and down in his contracted quarters, bitterly cursing the while the absurd timidity which not only was responsible for his cold and fatigue and the hunger which he was beginning to feel, but which also — and that was the saddest of all — deprived him of Mary's society. He blamed himself bitterly for his wretched

failure to profit by what he had so gallantly undertaken, and because his heart had failed him just as he was finishing what he had begun so well.

Let us hasten to say, in order not to misrepresent our hero's character, that his consciousness of his error gave him no additional courage; and that, with all the reproaches he heaped upon himself, it never once occurred to him to go down and boldly demand at the marquis's hands the hospitable treatment the prospect of which had been by no means the least incentive to his flight.

Meanwhile the soldiers had made their appearance; and Michel, attracted by the noise they made, in coming in, to the narrow window which looked upon the rear of the château, saw through the brilliantly lighted windows of the main building Mesdemoiselles de Souday, the general and his officers, and the marquis passing to and fro.

Then it was that, spying Rosine at the foot of the little tower, of which he was then occupying the summit, he deemed it a good opportunity to make an attempt to renew the interest which new guests had completely robbed him of; and, with his natural modesty, he asked the new boarder at the château for a morsel of bread, — a request, by the way, which was by no means in harmony with his hunger, which, originally slight, had been rendered positively canine by the moral and physical rebuffs he had encountered.

When he heard a light step approaching his prison, he felt deeply grateful; for the step contained a promise of two things, — one certain, the other probable.

The thing of which he felt certain was that his appetite was to be satisfied, while it was probable that he would hear something about Mary.





THE ROOM IN THE LITTLE TOWER.

Drawn by Félix Oudart.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, I. 357.



"Is it you, Rosine?" he asked, as he heard a hand upon the knob of the door.

"No, it's not Rosine, Monsieur Michel; it's I."

Michel recognized Mary's voice, but could not believe his ears.

The voice went on, —

"Yes, I; and I am furiously angry with you!"

As the accent, however, was not in harmony with the words, Michel was not over-alarmed by the "furious anger."

"Mademoiselle Mary!" he ejaculated. "Mademoiselle Mary! *Mon Dieu!*"

He leaned against the wall to keep himself from falling.

Meanwhile the maiden had opened the door.

"You!" cried Michel; "you, Mademoiselle Mary! Oh, how happy I am!"

"Oh, no; not so happy as you pretend to be."

"Why not?"

"Because you admit, with all your happiness, that you are dying with hunger."

"Ah, mademoiselle, who told you that?" stammered Michel, blushing up to the whites of his eyes.

"Rosine! Come, hurry up, Rosine!" continued Mary. "Good! First of all, put your lantern on that board, and then hurry and open your basket. Don't you see that M. Michel is devouring it with his hungry gaze?"

This raillery on Mary's part made the young baron rather ashamed of the vulgar need which he had expressed to his foster-sister.

He had a faint idea that it would be an extremely gallant performance to seize Rosine's basket, hustle back into it the comestibles which she had already taken out

and spread upon the board, throw the whole business out of window even at the risk of slaughtering a soldier, fall at the young girl's feet and say to her in moving tones, with both hands upon his heart, "How can I think of my stomach when my heart is so happy?"

But such ideas as those might have occurred to Michel for several consecutive years without his ever making up his mind to resort to such cavalier methods; so he allowed Mary to treat him like Rosine's foster-brother.

Upon her suggestion he resumed his seat upon his couch of oats, and took the keenest delight in eating the food cut for him by the damsel's shapely white hand.

"Oh, what a child you are!" said Mary. "Why, in Heaven's name, after performing such a gallant deed, rendering us such a very great service at the risk of breaking your bones,—why did you not say to my father, as you might so naturally have done, 'Monsieur, it will be impossible for me to go back to my mother's house to-night. Pray put me up till to-morrow morning'?"

"Oh, I should never have dared!" cried Michel, letting his arms fall at his sides, like a man who hears a suggestion of which he had never dreamed.

"Why not?" Mary asked.

"Because Monsieur your father overawes me tremendously."

"My father! Why, he's the best man in the world. And then, aren't you our friend, I should like to know?"

"Oh, how kind you are, mademoiselle, to give me that title!"

Then he ventured timidly to go one step farther.

"Is it really true," he asked, "that I have already earned it?"

Mary blushed slightly.

A few days before she would not have hesitated to reply that he was so truly her friend that few moments passed, day or night, when she was not thinking of him; but in those few days love had strangely modified her feelings, and its first result had been to develop an instinctive bashfulness which, in her innocence, she had never suspected. In proportion as she had come to realize her womanhood, through the revelation of sensations hitherto entirely unknown to her, she had also realized that the manners and habits and language, which resulted from the strange bringing up she had received, were altogether unusual; and with the intuitive faculty peculiar to womankind, she understood exactly what she must acquire in the way of modest reserve, in order to attain the qualities which she lacked, and of which the emotion which was now dominant in her heart made her feel the necessity.

So it was that Mary, who up to that time had never thought of concealing a single one of her thoughts, began to comprehend that a young lady may sometimes find it necessary to make evasive answers, if not to lie outright; and she substituted a very commonplace remark for the reply she would have liked to make.

"Why, surely you have done enough for that," she said.

Without giving him time to carry the conversation any farther on that delicate subject, she went on, —

"Come, now, give us a proof of that great appetite you were boasting so about just now by eating the wing of this chicken."

"But I have eaten too much already, mademoiselle," said Michel, naïvely.

"Oh, what a poor eater you are! Come, do as I say,

or else I will go away; for I am here only to wait on you."

"Oh, mademoiselle," cried Michel, extending his hands, one of which was armed with a fork, while the other held a piece of bread, — "mademoiselle, you won't be so cruel! Oh, if you knew how sad and unhappy I have been in this lonesome place the last two hours!"

"That's easily explained," laughed Mary; "you were hungry."

"Oh, no, no, no! It was not that alone! Just imagine: from here I could see you going back and forth with all those officers —"

"It's your own fault! Instead of hiding yourself like a swallow in this old tower, you might have stayed in the drawing-room, gone to dinner with us, and taken your food sitting on a chair before a table like a Christian. You might have heard my father and General Dermoncourt tell of mighty deeds which would have made your flesh creep; and lastly, you might have seen our Compère Lorient — as my father calls him — eat, which is quite as frightful in its way."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Michel.

"What is it?" asked Mary, surprised at his exclamation.

"Master Lorient, of Machecoul?"

"Master Lorient, of Machecoul," Mary repeated.

"My mother's notary?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure!" said Mary.

"Is he here?"

"He certainly is. And, by the way, do you know what he is doing, or rather what he came to do?" pursued Mary, laughing.

"No."

"He came to find you."

"Me?"

"For that alone, at the baronne's request."

"But, mademoiselle," said Michel, in terror, "I don't want to go back to La Logerie, you know."

"Why not?"

"Why, because she will shut me up, or put me out of the way; because she wants to keep me away from — my friends!"

"Bah! La Logerie is not far from Souday."

"No; but Paris is a long way from La Logerie, and the baronne proposes to carry me off to Paris. Did you tell this notary that I was here?"

"Indeed, I did nothing of the kind."

"Oh, mademoiselle, how grateful I am to you!"

"You need n't be; I did n't know it."

"But now that you do know it —"

Michel hesitated.

"Well, what then?"

"You must not tell him, mademoiselle," said Michel, ashamed of his own weakness.

"Ah, Monsieur Michel!" said Mary, "upon my word, I must confess one thing —"

"Confess it, mademoiselle; do!"

"Well, it seems to me that if I were a man, Master Lorient would not worry me much under any circumstances."

Michel appeared to be summoning all his strength preparatory to making a desperate resolution.

"Indeed, you are right," said he; "and I will go now and tell him that I shall never return to La Logerie."

At this moment the young people were startled by the voice of the cook, calling loudly for Rosine.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" they exclaimed in one breath, each about as frightened as the other.

"Do you hear, *mademoiselle*?" said Rosine.

"Yes."

"She 's calling me."

"*Mon Dieu*!" said Mary again, rising, and all ready to take flight. "Can they suspect that we are here?"

"Well, if they do suspect it, or if they know it, even, there 's no great harm in it," replied Rosine.

"Very true; but —"

"Listen," said Rosine.

There was a moment's silence; then they heard the cook's voice again at a distance.

"You hear," said Rosine, making ready to descend, "she 's calling me in the garden now."

"Look here, you 're not going away!" said Mary; "you 're not going to leave me here alone, I hope!"

"Why, I don't see that you're alone when you 're with M. Michel," said Rosine, innocently.

"Yes; but to return to the house —" stammered Mary.

"Well, upon my word," said Rosine, in amazement; "have you suddenly turned coward, pray, — you who are ordinarily so brave, and ride around through the woods as fearlessly by night as by day? Why, I should hardly know you!"

"No matter! Stay here, Rosine."

"Nonsense! For all the good I have done during the half-hour I have been here, I might just as well go away."

"That 's very true, Rosine; but that 's not what I want you for."

"What is it, then?"

"I wanted to say to you —"

"What?"

"Why — why that — that this poor child can't pass the night here."

"Very well; where will he pass it, then?" asked Rosine.

"I don't know; but we must find a room for him."

"Without telling M. le Marquis?"

"Oh, no! and my father knows nothing about it. *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* what can we do? Ah, Monsieur Michel, it's all your fault!"

"Mademoiselle," said Michel, "I am quite ready to go, if you wish."

"Who said that you were to go?" exclaimed Mary, quickly. "No, indeed; you will stay."

"An idea, Mademoiselle Mary," interposed Rosine.

"What is it?" asked Mary.

"Suppose I speak to Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"No," replied Mary, so eagerly that she surprised herself; "no, it's useless! I will tell her myself as soon as we go down, when M. Michel has finished his unlucky little supper."

"I will go now, then," said Rosine.

Mary did not dare to keep her any longer; so Rosine took her departure, and left the two young people alone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHICH ENDS QUITE OTHERWISE THAN MARY
EXPECTED.

THE little room was lighted only by the rays of the lantern, most of which seemed to waste their energy upon the hall-door, leaving the rest of the room (if the pigeon-house in which our young people found themselves can be properly so-called) in almost total darkness.

Michel was still sitting on the bag of oats; Mary was kneeling in front of him, searching every corner of the basket, rather from embarrassment perhaps than from love of her neighbor, to see if she could not find some *bonne bouche* to put an end to the feast Rosine had improvised for the poor hermit.

But so much had taken place that Michel was no longer hungry; with his head on his hand, and his arm resting on his knee, he gazed fondly at the sweet face which he saw in a sort of shadow which increased two-fold the charm of its delicate features, and he inhaled with ecstasy the waves of perfume which came to him from the long, fair locks moving gently in the wind, and almost touching his lips; at the touch, the perfume, the sight, his blood coursed more quickly through his veins; he heard the arteries in his temples throbbing, and felt through all his limbs a thrill which finally reached his brain. Under the sway of such emotions, altogether new to him, the young man felt his heart beating with strange hopes; he was learning what it is to have a wish.

In the very bottom of his heart he wished for some means of telling Mary that he loved her. He cudgelled his brain to know how he should do it, but to no purpose; he could think of no way so simple as to take her hand and put it to his lips.

That was what he did, suddenly, without any clear idea of what he was doing.

"Monsieur Michel! Monsieur Michel!" exclaimed Mary, more amazed than angry; "pray what are you doing?"

She rose quickly to her feet, and Michel saw that he had gone too far to recede, and must now tell the whole thing.

It was his turn to adopt the position Mary had just abandoned, that is to say, he fell on his knees, and as he did so succeeded in regaining possession of the hand which had escaped him.

To be sure the hand made no attempt to avoid being retaken.

"Oh, have I offended you?" cried the young man. "If I have, I am very unhappy, and I very humbly ask your pardon on my knees."

"Monsieur Michel!" said the maiden, without knowing what she was saying.

But the baron had enveloped the little hand in both of his for fear that it might escape him again, and, as he did not know any too well what he was saying, he went on:—

"Oh, if I have abused your kindness, tell me, mademoiselle, I implore you, that you are not angry with me for it."

"I will tell you so, monsieur, when you stand up," said Mary, with a weak effort to withdraw her hand. But the effort was so weak that its only result was to

convince Michel that the captivity of the hand was not altogether forced.

"No," rejoined the young baron, under the empire of that exaltation which is caused by hope, almost changed to certainty, — "no, let me stay here at your feet. Oh, if you knew how many times since I first met you, I have dreamed that I was kneeling thus before you! if you knew what sweet emotion, what delicious anguish, this dream, though it was naught but a dream, produced in me, — oh! you would let me enjoy the good fortune which at this moment is real."

"But, Monsieur Michel," replied Mary, in a voice which became more and more tremulous as she realized that the moment was near at hand when she could no longer doubt the young man's affection for her, — "but, Monsieur Michel, one should kneel thus only before God and the blessed saints."

"Upon my word," said Michel, "I don't know whom one should kneel before, nor why I am kneeling before you; my present sensations are so different from anything I ever felt before, even from my affection for my mother, that I don't know what to think of the sentiment which makes me adore you. It is something akin to the veneration with which people prostrate themselves before God and the saints, as you just said. For me, you are the whole creation, and in adoring you, it seems to me that I am adoring all creation."

"Oh, for pity's sake, monsieur, don't talk to me in that way any more — Michel, my friend!"

"Oh, no, no, leave me as I am! let me implore you to allow me to consecrate my life to you with absolute devotion. Alas! I feel deeply — believe, that I am not deceiving myself — since I have seen those who are really men; I feel how paltry a thing is the devotion of such a

poor, weak, timid child as I am, and yet it seems to me that there ought to be such perfect happiness in suffering, shedding my blood, dying if need be, for you, that the hope of winning that happiness would give me the strength and courage which I lack."

"Why talk of suffering and death?" rejoined Mary, in her gentle voice; "do you think that death and suffering are actually necessary to prove the depth of one's affection?"

"Why do I speak of them, Mademoiselle Mary? Why do I call them to my assistance? Why, because I don't dare to hope for happiness in any other way; because to live happily, tranquilly, and at peace by your side, blessed with your love, to call you my wife in short, seems to me a dream beyond all human hopes, and I cannot imagine that I can ever be permitted to realize such a dream."

"Poor child!" said Mary, in a tone which expressed quite as much compassion as affection; "you love me dearly, then?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle Mary, what's the use of my telling you so, over and over again? Don't you see it with your eyes and your heart? Pass your hand across my brow, bathed in sweat, place it upon my wildly beating heart; see how my whole body is trembling with excitement, and ask me if I love you!"

The feverish exaltation which had produced so sudden and complete a transformation in the bashful youth had communicated itself to Mary; she was no less moved and trembling than he; she had forgotten everything,—her father's detestation of the name Michel bore, as well as Madame de la Logerie's scorn for her family, and even Bertha's illusions as to Michel's love, which she, Mary, had so many times promised herself to respect; the

youthful fervor of her vigorous, untrained nature had assumed the upper hand over the reserve which of late she had thought it proper to maintain. She was on the point of giving full play to the tenderness which was surging in her heart, and to reply to his impassioned love with a love more impassioned than his perhaps, when a slight noise at the door made her turn her head.

She saw Bertha standing straight and motionless upon the threshold.

The slide of the lantern, as we have already said, was opposite the door, so that its light was concentrated upon Bertha's face. Mary could see how pale she was, and what a wealth of grief and anger was stored up behind those frowning eyebrows and those tightly closed lips.

She was so terrified at the unlooked-for and almost threatening apparition, that she pushed away the young man whose hand was still holding hers, and ran toward her sister. But she, entering the room at the same moment, pushed Mary aside with her hand as she would have done some inanimate mass, and walked straight up to Michel.

"Monsieur," she said in vibrating tones, "did not my sister tell you that M. Lorient, Madame la Baronne's notary, is here seeking you on her behalf, and wishes to speak with you?"

Michel stammered some incoherent words.

"You will find him in the drawing-room," said Bertha, in the same tone in which she would have delivered an order.

Michel, whose timidity and terror had returned in full force, arose, with trembling legs, and so confused that he could not find a word to say; he went to the door like a naughty child who obeys without the courage to make excuses.

Mary took the lantern to light the poor boy, but Bertha snatched it out of her hands, and put it into Michel's with a peremptory gesture of dismissal.

"But what will you do, mademoiselle?" Michel ventured to ask.

"Oh! we know the house," said Bertha.

"Go, I tell you go!" she continued, stamping her foot on the floor angrily, as she saw Michel looking at Mary.

The youth disappeared, leaving the girls without other light than the pale gleam which came in through the little window, cast by a sickly moon obscured every instant by clouds.

Left alone with her sister, Mary expected a storm of reproaches based upon the impropriety of a *tête-à-tête*, of which at that moment she comprehended the result.

But she was mistaken. As soon as Michel disappeared down the winding stair, and she knew from the sound of his steps that he had really gone, Bertha seized her sister's hand, and squeezed it with a force which sufficiently indicated the violence of her emotion.

"What was he saying to you there on his knees at your feet?" she demanded, in a voice choked with excitement.

Mary's only response was to throw her arms around her sister's neck, and despite her efforts to push her away she held her in a close embrace, and moistened her face with the tears which ran from her eyes.

"Why are you angry with me, dear sister?" she said.

"It's not a sign of anger, Mary, to ask you what that young man whom I caught at your feet was saying to you."

"But is this your ordinary way of speaking to me?"

"What has my way of speaking to do with my question? What I desire, what I *demand*, is that you answer it."

"Bertha! Bertha!"

"Oh! come, tell me! What was he saying to you? I ask you what he was saying?" cried the young girl roughly, shaking her sister so violently by the arm that she uttered a cry and fell back as if she were going to faint.

The cry restored Bertha to her senses.

Her impetuous, wild, but sovereignly kind nature melted at this indication of the grief and pain she was causing her sister to suffer; she did not let her fall to the floor, but caught her in her arms, took her up as if she had been a child, and lay her upon the board, holding her all the while in a close embrace; then she covered her with kisses, and a few tears flashed from her eyes like sparks from a brazier and fell upon Mary's cheeks.

Bertha wept like Maria-Theresa; instead of flowing from her eyes, her tears flashed out like lightning flashes.

"Poor darling! poor darling!" she said, speaking to her sister as to a child, carelessly hurt, "forgive me! I hurt you—I wounded you, which is much worse! please forgive me!"

Then she turned upon herself: "Forgive me!" she repeated, "for it's my own fault. I ought to have opened my heart to you before, to show you how the strange love I feel for this man—for this child," she added, disdainfully—"has taken complete possession of me, and has succeeded in making me jealous of one whom I love more than all the world, more than life, yes, more than him! Make me jealous of you! Ah,

Mary, if you knew how much suffering this insane love has already brought in its train,— this love which is, I admit, beneath me! if you knew how hard I struggled before I yielded to it! how bitterly I deplore my weakness! He has none of the qualities which I esteem; he has none of the qualities I love; neither noble birth, nor loyalty, nor ardor, nor unconquerable strength, nor unconquered courage, and yet, notwithstanding everything, I love him! I loved him at first sight. I love him so dearly, you see, that sometimes, bathed in perspiration, gasping for breath, despairing, a prey to inexpressible agony, I cry like a mad-woman: ‘Oh, my God, kill me, but leave me his love.’ In the brief time that has passed since, to my misery, we first met him, I have never ceased to think of him for a single instant; I have a strange feeling for him which certainly ought to be what a woman feels for her lover, but which resembles even more nearly a mother’s fondness for her son. Every day my life becomes more and more concentrated in him; in him are centred not merely all my thoughts, but all my dreams, and all my hopes as well. Ah, Mary, Mary, just now I asked you to forgive me; now I say to you, ‘Pity me, my sister! my sister, have pity on me!’ ”

As she ceased speaking Bertha embraced her sister, in a sort of desperation, more closely than ever.

Poor Mary had listened tremblingly to this explosion of the almost savage passion which was what was to be expected from such a masterful absolute nature as Bertha’s. Every cry, every word, every phrase blew into ribbons the lovely rose-lined clouds which, a few short moments before, had seemed to veil her future, and her sister’s impulsive tones swept away the *débris* as the west wind does the streaks of vapor which hover

in the air after the tempest. At every word her bitter tears fell faster; but likewise at every word she felt that her love for Bertha rendered imperative the sacrifice which she had vaguely thought about more than once, without daring to let her mind rest upon it.

Her own grief and distraction absorbed her so during Bertha's last words that she only knew from the silence that the time had come for her to reply.

She made a mighty effort to control her sobs.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said she, "my heart is broken, dear sister, and my grief is so much the greater because all that has happened this evening is in a measure my fault."

"What? No," cried Bertha, with her wonted earnestness; "I ought to have looked out to see what became of him when I left the chapel. But after all," she continued with the persistent recurrence to one idea characteristic of those who are madly in love, "what was he saying to you, and why was he at your feet?"

Mary felt Bertha's whole body shiver when she repeated that question; she herself was beside herself with grief as she thought of the reply she had to make. It seemed to her as if every word she used in explaining to Bertha what had taken place would burn her lips, as it issued from her heart.

"Come, come," continued Bertha, shedding tears which affected Mary even more deeply than her sister's wrath; "come, tell me, dear girl! Have pity on me! My anxiety is a hundred times more cruel than actual suffering. Tell me! tell me! was he not speaking to you of love?"

Mary did not know how to lie; or, at least, self-sacrificing devotion had not yet taught her to lie.

"Yes," she said.

"Oh! *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Bertha, tearing herself away from Mary, and throwing herself with arms extended against the wall.

There was such an ocean of despair in her ejaculation that Mary was terrified; she forgot Michel, she forgot her love, she forgot everything save her sister alone. The sacrifice which her heart had hesitated about making when she first learned that Bertha loved Michel she accomplished bravely, and with sublime abnegation of self, she smiled though her heart was broken.

"Foolish girl that you are!" she cried, throwing her arms about Bertha's neck anew; "why don't you let me finish?"

"Why! didn't you tell me that he was talking of love to you?" rejoined the wounded maiden.

"True; but I didn't say who was the object of that love."

"Mary, Mary, have pity on my poor heart!"

"Bertha! dear Bertha!"

"Was it of me that he spoke to you?"

Mary had not the strength to reply in words; she made an affirmative motion of her head.

Bertha's breath came quick and loud; several times she passed her hand across her burning brow; the shock had been too rude for her to return to her normal condition at once.

"Mary," said she, "this that you tell me seems so absurd, so wildly improbable, that you must convince me with an oath. Swear —"

She hesitated.

"Whatever you choose, dear sister," said Mary, who was herself in great haste to put an insuperable barrier between her heart and her love.

"Swear that you do not love Michel, and that Michel

does not love you. Swear it by our mother's tomb," she added, placing her hand upon Mary's shoulder.

"By our mother's tomb," said Mary firmly, "I swear that I will never be Michel's."

She threw herself into her sister's arms, seeking the reward of her sacrifice in her caresses.

If the darkness had been less profound, Bertha might have guessed from Mary's discomposed features how much the oath she had taken had cost her.

It seemed, however, to have restored Bertha's tranquillity completely, and she sighed gently as if her heart had been relieved of a great weight.

"Thanks!" she murmured, "oh, thank you, thank you! Now, let us go down."

But on the way Mary made an excuse to go to her own room, where she shut herself up to weep and pray.

They had not yet left the table; and as she crossed the hall on her way to the drawing-room, Bertha could hear the loud voices of the banqueters.

She found M. Lorient alone with the baron whom he was trying to induce that it would be to his advantage, as it clearly was his duty, to return to La Logerie.

But the young man's unsympathetic silence was so eloquent that M. Lorient soon found himself short of arguments; although, to be sure, he had been talking more than half an hour.

Michel was evidently no less embarrassed than his interlocutor; for he welcomed Bertha much as a battalion formed in hollow square, and surrounded on all sides, welcomes reinforcements which enable it to cut its way out.

He rushed up to the maiden with an eagerness which had some connection also with his uneasiness as to the result of her *tête-à-tête* with Mary.

To his great surprise, Bertha, who was utterly incapable of hiding her feelings, extended her hand, and pressed his most warmly.

She misconstrued the baron's movement, and her countenance, which had expressed placid content, became radiant with joy.

Michel, who expected just the reverse, was ill at ease. So he at once turned to Master Lorient again.

"You may say to my mother for me, monsieur," said he, "that a man of spirit finds his real duty in assisting to establish his political opinions, and that I am determined to die, if I must, in the performance of mine."

Poor boy! he confounded his duty with his love.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BLUE AND WHITE.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when the Marquis de Souday suggested to his guests to adjourn to the drawing-room.

They left the table in that condition of calm self-satisfaction which always follows a bountiful dinner, when the master of the house is a good fellow, when the guests have a good appetite, and when, best of all, interesting conversation has filled the intermissions between the acts of the principal performance.

In suggesting that they return to the drawing-room, M. de Souday probably had no other purpose than to change the atmosphere; for, as he rose from the table, he ordered Rosine and the cook to follow him with the bottles, and to place them with a proper supply of glasses on the drawing-room table.

Then, humming the air of "Richard Cœur-de-Lion," without noticing that the general replied with the refrain of "La Marseillaise" which the noble timbers of the Château de Souday then heard in all likelihood for the first time, the old gentleman, having filled the glasses, prepared to continue an interesting discussion as to the treaty of Jaunaye, which the general insisted had not sixteen articles, when the latter pointed to the clock.

Dermoncourt smilingly remarked that he suspected his worthy host of a design to engulf his enemies in the dissipations of a new Capua, and the marquis, taking

the joke with infinite tact and good-humor, hastened to gratify the wishes of his guests, and escort them to the apartments set aside for them; after which he sought his own couch.

Excited by his warlike inclinations, and by the tone of the conversation in which he had passed the evening, the Marquis de Souday dreamed of naught but fighting.

He was taking part in a battle, compared with which those of Torfou, Laval, and Saumur were mere child's play; through a perfect hail-storm of shot and shell he was leading his division to the assault of a redoubt, and was planting the white flag on the summit of the enemy's earthworks, when a succession of blows upon the door of his room drew his attention away from his exploits.

During the transitional state of half-sleep, the dream continued, and the noise at his door seemed to his ears nothing less than the roar of cannon; but gradually the battle-scene faded away, the marquis opened his eyes, and instead of the field of carnage, strewn with broken gun-carriages, gasping horses, and corpses over which he thought he was marching, he found himself on his narrow cot of painted wood, between unassuming bed curtains of white muslin with a red border.

At this moment, the knocking was renewed.

"Come in!" shouted the marquis, rubbing his eyes. "Ah, general," he continued, "you came in good time; two minutes more, and you were a dead man!"

"How so?"

"Yes, sir, I was just about to cut you in halves with one blow."

"By way of revenge, my good friend," said the general, extending his hand.

"All right. But I see you are looking at my mean quarters with astonished eyes; you are surprised to find

them so shabby. Yes, it certainly is a far cry from this gloomy, bare room, these horsehair chairs, and this uncarpeted floor, to the suites in which your grand Parisian seigneurs have their abode. But what would you have? I passed one-third of my life in camp, and another third in poverty, and this cot, with its thin horsehair mattress, is in my eyes a luxury well suited to my old age. But tell us what brings you here so early, my dear general, for I should say it's hardly an hour since daybreak?"

"I have come to say farewell, my dear host," replied the general.

"Already! Such is life! Look you, I confess, I had all sorts of unpleasant prejudices against you when you arrived here last night."

"Really? and yet you were so cordial to me!"

"Pshaw!" laughed the marquis; "you have been in Egypt; did you never get fired on in one of those delicious green oases?"

"*Pardieu*, yes! the Arabs look upon them as the best spots for an ambushade."

"Well, I reproach myself with having been something of an Arab last night! I say my *mea culpa* for it, and I regret it the more, because I now feel extremely sorry to think that you are going to leave me so soon."

"Because the most mysterious corner of your oasis still remains for you to show me?"

"No, because your frankness, your loyalty, and the common danger we have incurred on opposite sides aroused my profound and sincere friendship — I don't know how, but so it is."

"On your word as a gentleman?"

"As a gentleman and a soldier."

"Well, I offer you the same, my dear enemy," replied the general; "I expected to find an old *émigré* covered

with white powder, overflowing with arrogance, and stuffed with Gothic prejudices."

"And you found that a man might wear powder without the prejudices."

"I found a frank and loyal heart, and a lovable disposition,—yes, jovial, too, with the exquisite manners which ordinarily seem to exclude all such qualities; the result is that you have fascinated the old fellow, and he has lost his heart to you."

"Ah! I'm very glad to hear you say that. Come, stay with me to-day, unconditionally."

"Impossible."

"There's no way of answering that word; but, at all events, give me your word of honor that you will come and see me after the peace, if we both are still in this world."

"What! After the peace? Pray, are we at war?" asked the general, laughing.

"No, we are between peace and war."

"Yes, just on the line."

"Well, then, let us say after we get off the line."

"I give you my word."

"And I shall hold you to it."

"But come, now, let's talk sense," said the general, taking a chair and sitting at the foot of the old *émigré's* bed.

"I ask nothing better," retorted the latter. "Once does n't make a custom."

"You love hunting, do you not?"

"Passionately."

"Of what variety?"

"All kinds."

"But there must be some one kind that you prefer?"

"Boar hunting,—that reminds me of hunting Blues."

"Thanks."

"Boars and Blues have the same *coup de boutoir*."¹

"What do you say to fox hunting?"

"Bah!" said the marquis, sticking out his lower lip like a prince of the House of Austria.

"Ah, but it's fine sport!" said Dermoncourt.

"I leave that to Jean Oullier, who has marvellous tact and wonderful patience about lying in wait for a fox."

"Tell me, marquis, this Jean Oullier lies in wait for other things than foxes, does n't he?"

"Aha! he's very good after all sorts of game, and no mistake."

"Marquis, I would be glad to see you develop a taste for fox-hunting."

"Why so?"

"Because it's particularly popular in England, and I'm sure I don't know why, but I have every reason to believe that the air of England would be a fine thing for you and your daughters just at this time."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the marquis, half-rising from his bed and assuming a sitting posture.

"It's just as I have the honor to tell you, my host."

"Which means that you advise me to emigrate a second time? Thanks!"

"If you call a little pleasure trip, emigration, yes."

"My dear general, I know all about these little trips. It's worse than going around the world; one knows when they begin, but it's impossible to say when they will end; and then there's something that you would not believe perhaps —"

"What's that?"

¹ This expression means a "blow with the snout;" also, a "surly, disagreeable answer."

"You saw yesterday, and in the small hours this morning, that in spite of my age I enjoy a reasonably good appetite, and I give you my word that I have still to make the acquaintance of indigestion; I eat whatever I choose without inconvenience."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, that infernal English fog,— I never could digest that! It's curious, is n't it?"

"Go to Switzerland, then, or Spain, or Italy — anywhere under heaven; only leave Souday, leave Mache-coul, leave La Vendée!"

"Ah! ah! ah!"

"I mean it."

"Are we compromised, then?"

"If you are n't now, you soon will be."

"At last!" cried the old gentleman, joyously, for he thought that the initiative of the Government would surely decide his co-religionists to take up arms.

"Let us not joke about it," said the general, seriously; "if I listened only to the voice of duty, my dear marquis, I must tell you that you would have two sentries at your door, and a non-commissioned officer sitting on this chair."

"The devil!" ejaculated the marquis, a little more seriously.

"Oh, yes, *mon Dieu!* it's as I say. But I understand perfectly how a man of your age, accustomed as you are to an active life and the free air of the forests, must necessarily suffer in the narrow confines of the cell in which the gentleman of the public prosecutor's office would probably shut you up; and I demonstrate the sympathetic friendship of which I just now spoke to you by thus making terms with my strict duty."

"But suppose this transaction is charged against you as a crime, general?"

"Bah! do you suppose I shall not have excuses enough? — a played-out, half-crazy old crank, who tried to stop the progress of the column!"

"Whom are you talking about? Whom do you call an old crank?"

"Why, you, of course!"

"I, an old crank, played-out, half-crazy!" cried the marquis, sticking his gaunt, bony leg half way out from beneath the clothes. "I'm sure, my dear general, I don't know why I don't insist upon your taking one of the swords from that wall, and playing for our breakfast on the first blood, as we used to do forty-five years ago when I was a page."

"Come, old boy," said Dermoncourt, "you are going so far toward proving that I am in the wrong, that I shall be compelled to call the two soldiers."

"No, no," said the marquis, as the general pretended to rise; "no, no! damnation! I *am* an old crank, and played-out, and half-crazy, — yes, altogether crazy! In short, I am whatever you choose to call me."

"That's more like it."

"But look you, have you any objection to telling me how and by whom I am in danger of being compromised?"

"In the first place, your servant, Jean Oullier —"

"Yes."

"The great fox-hunter —"

"I understand."

"Your servant, Jean Oullier — this is something I omitted to tell you last evening, because I supposed that you knew it as well as I — your servant, Jean Oullier, at the head of a band of insurgents, tried to arrest the march of the column, on its way to invest the château. In carrying out this attempt, he caused several slight

collisions, in which we lost three men, without counting the one whose judge and executioner I was, and whom I strongly suspect to have belonged hereabout."

"What was his name?"

"François Tinguay."

"Hush, general! not so loud, in pity's name! His sister is here; she is the young girl who waited on us at dinner, and her father is hardly buried."

"Oh, these civil wars! The devil put an end to them!" exclaimed the general.

"Yet they are the only logical ones."

"Perhaps so; but never mind. I captured him, your Jean Oullier, and he escaped."

"He did well, did n't he? Confess it."

"Yes; but he does n't want to fall into my clutches again."

"Oh, there's no danger; now that his eyes are open, I'll answer for him."

"So much the better! for in his case I have no disposition to be indulgent. I have n't talked with him about the great war, as I have with you."

"He served through it, however,— and gallantly, too, I promise you."

"All the worse for him; this is his second offence."

"But, general," said the marquis, "I don't see thus far how my keeper's conduct can be imputed to me."

"Just wait a moment: you spoke to me yesterday about the little birds who told you all of my movements between seven o'clock and ten."

"Yes."

"Well, I have my little birds as well as you, and they're quite as reliable as yours."

"I doubt it."

"They told me what was going on in your château throughout the day, yesterday."

"Let's hear what they told you," said the marquis, incredulously. "I am listening."

"Since day before yesterday, you have had two guests at the Château de Souday."

"Good! Here you are already doing more than you promised. You undertook to tell me what went on yesterday only, and you are beginning with the day before."

"These two were a man and a woman."

The marquis shook his head.

"Very well; let us say two men, then, — although one of them had nothing of our sex but the clothes."

The marquis said nothing, and the general went on:

"Of these two persons, the smaller passed the whole day in the château; the other rode all around the neighborhood to make an appointment for the evening with divers gentlemen, whose names I could give you, if I were less prudent than I am, as I do give you, for instance, that of the Comte de Bonneville."

Still the marquis held his peace; speaking, he must either admit what the general said or lie.

"These gentlemen arrived one by one. Several questions were discussed, the most pregnant of which had not for its object the greatest glory and prosperity and the longest possible duration of the Government of July."

"Confess, general, that you are no more in love with your Government of July than I am, although you serve it."

"What's that you say?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I say that you are a Republican, a Blue, an Ultramarine indeed, and that's a fast color."

"That's not the question."

"What is the question, then?"

"As to the strangers who met here between eight and nine last evening."

"Well, suppose I did receive a few of my neighbors in my own house; suppose I did make two strangers welcome here. Where's the crime in that, general? I speak, you see, with the Code at my tongue's end. Ah, but has the Law of Suspects been proclaimed again?"

"There's no crime in the neighbors' coming to your house; but a crime is committed when these same neighbors proceed to hold a council at which the question of an appeal to arms is discussed."

"How will you prove that?"

"The presence of the two strangers proves it."

"Nonsense!"

"Certainly it does; for of these two strangers, the smaller, who, being a blond, or a blonde, rather, of course had to disguise himself with a black wig, is no other than the Princesse Marie-Caroline, whom you call the Regent of the Kingdom, or her royal Highness Madame la Duchesse de Berry, when you don't call her Petit-Pierre."

The marquis almost leaped out of bed. The general was better posted than he was himself, and his statement was like a ray of light; he was overjoyed to have had the honor of receiving Madame la Duchesse de Berry in his château. But, unfortunately, as no joy in this world is absolutely complete, he had to restrain his satisfaction.

"What then?" said he.

"Well, while you were in the most interesting part of your discussion a young man whom one would hardly expect to meet in your camp came to warn you that my troop was on the way to your château. Then you, Monsieur le Marquis, suggested resistance (don't

deny it, for I am sure of it); but the contrary opinion was soon adopted. Mademoiselle your daughter, the dark-eyed one — ”

“ Bertha.”

“ Mademoiselle Bertha took a torch. She went out, and everybody except yourself, Monsieur le Marquis, who probably thought proper to anticipate the needs of the new guests whom Heaven sent you,— everybody went out with her. She crossed the courtyard to the chapel; she opened the chapel door, led the way in, and went straight to the altar. By pressing a spring which is hidden in the left foot of the lamb carved on the front of the altar, she tried to work a trap-door; but the spring, which, I presume, had not been called upon to perform its functions for a long while, refused to work. Then she took the bell used in saying Mass, the handle being of wood, and pressed it against the steel button. The panel rolled aside and disclosed a staircase leading to an underground passage. Mademoiselle Bertha then took two wax tapers from the altar, lighted them, and handed them to two of the persons who were with her. Then, having seen your guests safely into the passage, she closed the sliding panel behind them and returned, as did one other person, who did not immediately come into the house, but wandered around in the park. As for the fugitives, when they reached the end of the underground passage, which comes out among the ruins of the old château which can be seen from here, they had some difficulty in picking their way over the rocks, and one of them fell. At last they got down into the narrow road which skirts the park walls, and there they took counsel. Three took the road from Nantes to Machecoul, two the cross-road leading to Légé, and the sixth and seventh doubled up — ”

"Oh, the devil! this is some fable of the Blues you're telling me, general!"

"Just wait! You interrupt me at the most interesting part. I was saying that the sixth and seventh fugitives doubled up, — that is to say, the taller took the little one on his shoulders, and they went along in that fashion until they got to the little brook which runs into the broad stream that flows at the foot of the Viette des Biques. And, upon my honor, that one, or those two, are the ones I am most anxious to make the acquaintance of. I shall set my dogs on their trail."

"But once more, general," cried the marquis, "I repeat that all this has no existence except in your imagination."

"Now, look here, my old enemy! you are the captain of the wolf-hunt, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well; when you see in the soft earth a clearly marked foot-print, are you disposed to allow yourself to be persuaded that it's only a boar's ghost which has passed that way? Well, marquis, I have seen myself — I should say, I have read myself — all this that I have told you."

"Ah, *pardieu!*" said the marquis, turning over in his bed, with the admiring curiosity of an amateur detective, "you ought surely to tell me how you did it."

"Gladly," replied the general. "I still have a half-hour to spare. Just order a slice of *paté* and a bottle of wine brought here for me, and I will tell you all about it, — between mouthfuls."

"On one condition."

"What's that?"

"That I join you."

"What! so early in the morning?"

"Does your real hearty appetite know anything about clocks?"

The marquis leaped out of bed, put on a pair of trousers and his slippers, rang, ordered a table laid, and seated himself opposite the general, with an expectant air.

Dermoncourt, challenged to exhibit his proofs, began in these words, between mouthfuls, as he had said. He was a fine *raconteur*, but he was also a much heartier eater than the marquis.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHICH PROVES THAT SPIDERS' WEBS ARE TREACHEROUS AFFAIRS FOR OTHERS THAN FLIES.

"You know, my dear marquis," said the general, by way of exordium, "that I ask you to divulge no secrets; and I am so perfectly sure, so profoundly confident that everything took place as I say, that I won't even ask you to say whether I am right or wrong. I simply undertake to prove to you, as a gratification of my own self-esteem, that we have as keen a scent in our camp as you in your fields, — a little vain-glorious gratification which I give myself, that's all."

"Go on! go on!" exclaimed the marquis, as impatient as he was when Jean Oullier came to tell him, in fine, frosty weather, that he had started up a wolf.

"Let us begin at the beginning. I knew that M. le Comte de Bonneville arrived here night before last, accompanied by a little peasant who had every appearance of a woman disguised as a man, and whom we suspect to be Madame. That information we owe to a spy, and I don't include it in my private inventory," added the general.

"You are right. Pah!" ejaculated the marquis.

"But when I arrived here in my own person (as we soldiers say in our bulletin French), without being in the least disconcerted by the assaults of courtesy which you made upon us, as you must admit, I noticed immediately two things."

"Well, what were they?"

"In the first place, that at five out of the ten covers which were laid, the napkins were rolled up as if belonging to the regular occupants of the château. In case of a prosecution, my dear marquis, don't forget that that would be decidedly an extenuating circumstance."

"How so?"

"As proving that you did n't know the real quality of your guests. If you had known it, would you have allowed them to roll up their napkins like simple country neighbors? No, no. The oak-chests of the Château de Souday are not so short of linen that Madame la Duchesse de Berry would not have a clean napkin at each meal. So I am inclined to believe that the fair-haired dame, disguised under a black wig, was in your eyes nothing more than a little dark-haired youth."

"Go on! go on!" said the marquis, biting his lips for shame before a perspicacity so far beyond his own.

"Oh, I have no idea of stopping! I noticed, then, five napkins rolled up, which proved that the dinner was not prepared for us, as you tried to make us believe that it was, but that you were simply giving us the places, among others, of M. de Bonneville and his companion, who did n't think fit to await our coming."

"Well, what was the second thing you noticed?"

"That Mademoiselle Bertha, whom I suppose to be and whom I would maintain to be a very neat and careful young woman, was, when I had the honor to be presented to her, curiously covered with cobwebs; she even had them in her lovely hair."

"What then?"

"Why, I was certain that she did not adopt that style of head-dress from coquetry, so this morning I just hunted up the part of the château which is most abund-

antly supplied with the result of the labors of those interesting insects."

"And you found —"

"Faith, my dear marquis, it does n't speak very well for your religious feelings, or, at least, for their exercise; for I found that that spot was the door of your chapel, where I descried at least a dozen of them working with incredible zeal to repair the havoc which had been wrought in their meshes during the night, — their zeal being inspired, doubtless, by the conviction that the opening of the door where they had established their workshop was a mere accident, which was not likely to occur again."

"Such indications are a trifle vague, I think you must admit, my dear general."

"Yes; but when your hound sticks his nose into the air, pulling slightly on the leash, that is a vaguer indication still, is it not? And yet you act upon it, and draw the wood with the very greatest care."

"To be sure!" said the marquis.

"Very well, that's my system, too; and in your paths, where there is little gravel, I discovered some very significant tracks."

"Foot-prints of men and women?" said the marquis.
"Pshaw! there are plenty of them everywhere."

"No, you'll not find everywhere a collection of foot-prints corresponding precisely to the number of *dramatis personæ* whom I imagine to have been on the stage at that moment; not the steps of people walking, either, but of people running, and running all together."

"Pray, how could you tell that they were running?"

"Ah, marquis, it's the A B C of the trade!"

"Never mind if it is; tell me."

"Because their toes make a deeper mark than the

heel, and because the earth is thrown out behind them. How 's that, Monsieur Huntsman?"

"True," said the marquis, with a knowing air; "true. What next?"

"Next?"

"Yes."

"I examined the prints. There were men's feet of all sorts, — boots, half-boots, and shoes. And amid all these male feet there were the marks of a slender, pretty little female foot, — a regular Cinderella's foot; a foot to make all the Andalusians from Cordova to Cadiz curse at the thought of the hob-nailed shoe which encased it."

"Go on! go on, pray!"

"Why so?"

"Because if you stop there another moment, you will fall in love with that hob-nailed shoe."

"Upon my word, I would like very well to get hold of it. That will come, perhaps! But it was on the steps of the chapel porch, and the flag-stones inside, that the traces became most distinct; the mud left its own traces, you see, on the polished flags. I found, in addition, near the altar, a large number of drops of wax; and they were all around a graceful, somewhat long foot-print, which I would swear was made by Mademoiselle Bertha's foot. And as there were other candle-marks on the upper step outside the door, directly beneath the lock, I conclude that Mademoiselle your daughter carried the light and used the key, holding the light at an angle with the left hand, while she introduced the key into the lock with the right. Moreover, the débris of the spiders' webs, carried away from the door and found in her hair, prove beyond question that she was the one who broke out the passage."

"Well, go on."

"Is it worth while to tell the rest? I saw that all these prints stopped at the altar. The foot of the Paschal Lamb was scratched, and the little steel button which connected with the spring was left exposed, so that I deserve no great credit for discovering it. It resisted my efforts, as it had previously resisted those of Mademoiselle Bertha, who scraped her fingers sufficiently to leave a little drop of blood on the fresh abrasion of the carved wood. Like her, I looked around for something hard with which to press the spring; and like her I made use of the wooden handle of the bell, which retained the marks of previous use, and, more than that, had a slight trace of blood."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the marquis, who evidently took a double interest in the narrative.

"Then, as you can readily understand," continued Dermoncourt, "I went down into the underground passage. The feet of the fugitives were distinctly impressed on the moist sand. One of them fell, clambering over the ruins. That fact was demonstrated to me by the discovery of a great bunch of nettles, all bruised and broken, as if some one had seized it and broken it with his hand,—a thing that was certainly not done intentionally, in view of the unsociable character of the plant. In a corner of the ruins, opposite a door, stones had been moved to facilitate the passage of some weaker vessel. In the nettles which grew against the wall, I found the two candles, which had been thrown there before the party emerged into the open air. Lastly, and to conclude, I came upon the steps again in the road; and as they separated there, I was able to classify them, as I told you."

"But that does not conclude your story."

"Not conclude it? Indeed it does."

"No. Who told you that one of the travellers took another one on his back?"

"Ah, marquis, you are trying to make me parade what little intelligence I have. The famous little foot in the hob-nailed shoe—the little foot which I have taken such a fancy to that I propose to give myself neither peace nor rest till I find it; the pretty little foot, no longer than a baby's and about the width of my two fingers—did n't lead me back on my tracks, as Made-moiselle Bertha's did. I came upon it again in the underground passage, and still again in the narrow road behind the ruins, at the spot where they stopped to deliberate,—as is easy to see by the way the ground is trampled there. It makes its appearance once more in the direction of the brook, and then suddenly disappears alongside a large rock which the rain would naturally have washed clean, but which I found covered with mud. At that spot, as hippogriffs do not exist in our day, I presume that M. de Bonneville took his young companion on his shoulders; for the step of said M. de Bonneville became much heavier, and no longer had the appearance of the step of a fresh, active young man, such as we were at his age. You know, marquis, that the weight of a wild sow, when carrying a litter, is quite doubled, and her toes, instead of just touching the ground, are planted solid and firmly? Well, from that rock on, it's the same way with M. de Bonneville's foot-prints."

"You have forgotten something, general."

"I don't think it."

"Oh, I don't propose to let you off with a single point unexplained. What makes you think that M. de

Bonneville rode around all day summoning my neighbors to the council?"

"You told me yourself that you did n't go out."

"Well, suppose I did?"

"Why, your horse, your favorite horse, — as I was informed he was by the pretty little maiden who held my rein, — your favorite horse, when I saw him in the stable, as I went to make sure that my Bucephalus had his feed, was covered with mud up to his hams; now, you surely would n't have trusted your horse to any but a man for whom you had the highest regard."

"Very well! One question more."

"As many as you please; I am here to answer."

"What makes you think that M. de Bonneville's companion is the august personage whom you mentioned a short time ago?"

"In the first place, because they let him pass first, always and everywhere, and move rocks about to make it easier for him."

"But can you tell by the foot whether the person who owns it is dark or fair?"

"No; but I have another way of telling that?"

"In Heaven's name, what is it? That's my last question, and if you answer it —"

"Well, suppose I answer it?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"Well, my dear marquis, you did me the honor to give me the very same apartment which M. de Bonneville's companion occupied yesterday."

"Yes, I did you that honor; what of it?"

"It's an honor for which I am exceedingly grateful to you; and here's a pretty little shell comb which I found at the foot of the bed. Confess, my dear marquis, that it's a very coquettish little comb to belong to

a young peasant. Moreover it contained, and contains still, as you can see, certain hairs of a light chestnut color, which are not in the least the same as the golden locks of your second daughter, who is the only blonde in your establishment."

"General," cried the marquis, leaping from his chair and throwing his fork across the room, "order my arrest if you see fit; but I tell you once, — yes, a hundred, a thousand times, — that I will not go to England. No, no, no; I will not go!"

"Oho, marquis, what sort of an insect is stinging you now?"

"No; you have aroused my emulation and stirred up my self-esteem, damn me! When you come to Souday after the campaign, as you have promised, I shall have the counterpart of your own stories to tell."

"Listen, my brave old enemy," said the general; "I have given you my word not to disturb you, — this time, at all events; and I will keep my word whatever you do, — whatever you have done, I should say. But I implore you in the name of all the interest you have awakened in me, in the name of your lovely daughters, take more heed to your actions; and if you won't leave France, do at least stay quietly at home."

"Why so?"

"Because the memories of the old heroic days, which make your heart beat fast to-day, are memories simply; because you will not find again the impulse to lofty and noble deeds, which you long to see born again; because the days of mighty conflict, of unreasoning devotion, of sublime death, have passed forever. Oh, I knew it, and knew it well, the old invincible Vendée! I can well say so, since I bear the mark of its steel on my chest; and during this last month which I have

passed in your midst, I have sought it in vain,—it is nowhere to be found! Reckon them up, my poor marquis, reckon up the young men of spirit and daring, who will brave the perils of an armed conflict; reckon up the old heroes who are with you in considering that that is still a duty in 1832, which was a duty in 1795; reckon them up, and tell me if such an unequal struggle is not insane on its face.”

“It will be only the more glorious for being mad, my dear general,” cried the marquis, in a state of excitement which made him altogether forget the political status of his interlocutor.

“What do you say? No, it will not even be glorious. Everything that takes place,—you will see how it goes, and just remember what I predicted before it began,—the whole affair will be paltry, lifeless, spiritless, and equally so on our side as on yours, God knows. Among us there will be all sorts of petty schemes and ignoble treachery; on your side selfish compositions, and cowardly backsliding which will strike you to the heart, and be your death, though the bullets of the Blues respect your sublime courage.”

“You look at things as a partisan of the established Government, general,” said the marquis; “you forget that we count upon finding friends in your ranks, and that when we give the word the whole province will rise as one man.”

The general shrugged his shoulders incredulously.

“In my day, old comrade (permit me to give you that title),” said he, “what was blue was blue, and all that was white was white; there was a touch of red, too, to be sure, but that was the executioner and the guillotine,—we won’t talk of them. You had no friends then in our ranks, and we counted upon none in yours; and for that

very reason we were equally strong, equally great, equally terrible. When you give the word La Vendée will rise, you say? Fatal mistake! La Vendée which invited death in 1795, in the hope of the coming of a prince, in whose word it trusted, but who was false to his word, will not stir an inch even when it sees in its midst Madame la Duchesse de Berry; your peasants have lost the political ardor which raises human mountains, puts them in motion against one another, and keeps them fighting until they are drowned in seas of blood, and also that religious faith which engenders and nourishes martyrs. Nor are we, I must confess it, my poor marquis, any longer spurred on by that fiery ardor for liberty, progress, and glory which shakes the foundations of the world and gives birth to heroes. The civil war which is about to begin, if indeed a civil war is to begin, will be a war, the manœuvres of which can be accurately foretold by a ready reckoner, — a war in which victory will necessarily fall to the side which has the greatest forces and the most abundant bags of gold; and that is why I said to you, Reckon well your chances; reckon them twice rather than once before you take a hand in this piece of monumental folly."

"You are mistaken, — once more I say you are mistaken, general. We shall not lack soldiers; and we are more fortunate than ever before in that we shall have a leader whose sex will galvanize the most timid into life, will arouse every man's single-hearted devotion, and impose silence upon all selfish ambition."

"Poor, valorous soul! poor, poetic spirit!" said the old soldier, with an accent of profound pity, as he let his scarred face fall on his chest. "A moment ago she had no more bitter enemy than I; but while I am in this room, on neutral soil, so to speak, let me say to

you how deeply I admire her resolution, her spirit, her persistence, but, at the same time, how I lament that she lives in an age for which she was not born. The time has gone by, marquis, when Jeanne de Montfort had but to stamp with her spurred boot upon the old soil of Bretagne to make it yield a crop of armed men. Marquis, mark well what I predict to-day, so that you may repeat it to her if you see her: that her noble heart, more daring and valiant than even the Comtesse Jeanne's, will reap as the reward of her self-sacrifice, her energy, her devotion, and the lofty elevation of her sentiments as princess and as mother, nought but indifference, ingratitude, cowardice, contempt, and perfidy of every sort. And now, my dear marquis, your last word?"

"My last word is in no wise different from my first, general."

"Say it once more, then."

"I will not go to England," declared the old *émigré*, with decision.

"Well, well," continued Dermoncourt, looking the marquis earnestly in the eye, and putting his hand on his shoulder; "you are proud as a Gascon, Vendean though you be. Your resources are limited, I know—Oh, come now, don't frown so darkly, but let me finish what I have to say. Why, damnation! you know very well that I would offer you nothing that I would not be willing to accept myself."

The marquis's face resumed its former expression.

"I was saying that your resources are limited, and that in this infernal region the having property is by no means the only thing, whether it's much or little it must be available, too. Well, then, if you lack the means to cross the Channel, and take a little cottage in some corner of England (I am not rich, either; I have only my

pay, but that has enabled me to lay by a few hundred louis), from a comrade it's easy to accept anything of the sort. Will you have them? After the peace, as you say, you can give them back."

"Hold! hold!" said the marquis; "you have only known me since yesterday, general, and you treat me like a friend of twenty years' standing."

The old Vendean scratched his head, and continued, as if speaking to himself,—

"How in the devil can I ever show my gratitude for his kindness to me?"

"You accept, then?"

"No, indeed! no, indeed! I refuse."

"But you will go away?"

"I remain here."

"May God guard you, and keep you in health, then," said the old general at the end of his patience. "However, it is probable that chance—the deuce take it!—will bring us face to face, as it did in the old days; but now I know you, and if there should be a *melée* like the one at Laval thirty-six years ago, why, I will hunt you up, I give you my word."

"And I, too!" cried the marquis; "I promise you that I will call your name with all the force of my lungs! I shall be so glad and proud at the same time to show all these youngsters what manner of men fought in the great war."

"I must be off; the bugle summons me. Farewell, marquis, and thanks for your hospitality."

"Till we meet again, general; and thanks for a friendship which I have still to prove to you that I reciprocate."

The two old fellows exchanged a cordial pressure of the hand, and Dermoncourt went out.

The marquis hurried on his clothes, and watched from the window the little column march off toward the forest. A short distance from the château they turned off to the right; the general stopped his horse and looked back for the last time at the little peaked towers of his new friend's abode. He saw him standing at the window and waved an adieu to him, then galloped after his troops.

Just as the marquis turned away from the window, after following with his eyes as long as he could the little squad and its commander, he heard a soft scratching noise at a little door which opened into his closet, and thence communicated with the servants' staircase.

"Who the devil can that be?" he asked himself as he drew the bolt.

The door at once flew open, and he spied Jean Oullier.

"Jean Oullier!" he cried in tones of heartfelt delight; "is it you? Ah, there you are, my good Jean Oullier! On my soul, the day begins with a happy omen."

He held out both hands to the old keeper, who grasped them with a lively sense of gratitude and respect.

Then he released his hand, fumbled in his pocket, and produced a sheet of coarse paper, folded in the form of a letter, which he handed to the marquis, who opened and read it.

As he read, his face lighted up with joy indescribable.

"Jean Oullier," he said, "call the girls, get everybody together. No; call no one yet, but polish up my sword, my pistols, my carbine, and all my paraphernalia of war. Give Tristan a good measure of oats. The campaign is about to open, my dear Jean Oullier, about to open! — Bertha! Mary! Bertha!"

"Monsieur le Marquis," said Jean, coolly, "the campaign opened at three o'clock yesterday so far as I am concerned."

The two girls came rushing in, in response to their father's call. Mary's eyes were red and swollen, but Bertha was fairly beaming.

"Young women," said the marquis, "you are in it too, you are to come with me! Read, read!"

He handed Bertha the letter he had received from Jean Oullier. It was thus conceived:—

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY : It will be advantageous to the cause of Henri V. that you put forward a few days the moment for taking up arms. Therefore be good enough to assemble the greatest possible number of devoted men in the division which you command, and hold yourself and them, yourself especially, at my instant disposal.

I think that two Amazons more in our little army would excite the love and self-esteem of our friends, and I ask you, Monsieur le Marquis, to give me your two lovely and fascinating huntresses as aides-de-camp.

Your affectionate

PETIT-PIERRE.

"Then we are to go?" asked Bertha.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the marquis.

"Then, father," said Bertha, "allow me to present you with a recruit."

"Of course."

Mary stood mute and motionless.

Bertha left the room, and returned the next moment, leading Michel by the hand.

"M. Michel de la Logerie," said she, emphasizing the title, "who asks an opportunity to prove to you, father, that his Majesty Louis XVIII. made no mistake in bestowing a title upon him."

The marquis whose brows contracted at the name of Michel, tried to look amiable.

"I shall follow M. Michel's efforts in that direction with much interest!" he said at last, in the same tone that the Emperor Napoleon might have adopted on the eve of Marengo or Austerlitz.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHEREIN THE SMALLEST FOOT IN FRANCE OR NAVARRE
FINDS THAT CINDERELLA'S SLIPPERS ARE LESS
DESIRABLE THAN SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS.

At this point, we must go back on our tracks, as Jean Oullier would say, and ask the permission of our readers to follow the flight of the Comte de Bonneville and Petit-Pierre, who, as they doubtless suspect, are not the least important characters in this narrative.

The general's suppositions were entirely accurate; emerging from the underground passage, the Vendean gentlemen picked their way through the ruins to the old road, and took counsel there for a few seconds as to the course they had best pursue.

He who hid his identity under the name of Gaspard, inclined to the opinion that they should keep together. Bonneville's emotion when Michel announced the approach of the troops did not escape him; he heard the cry which the comte uttered involuntarily: "Before everything, let us save Petit-Pierre!" and consequently, throughout the brief expedition, he had persistently scrutinized Petit-Pierre's features as well as he could by the feeble light of the candles, and, as the result of that scrutiny, he had adopted toward the young peasant a bearing which, though reserved, was expressive of the utmost respect.

In the midst of their discussion he spoke thus, very forcibly and warmly:—

"You have said, monsieur, to the Comte de Bonneville, that the welfare of the person in whose company you are travelling, was of paramount importance to ours, that it demanded our anxious solicitude, and was of the utmost consequence to the cause we are resolved to support. Would it not, then, be most natural that we should act as that person's escort, so that, if danger should arise—and we may meet it at every step—we should be on hand to make a rampart of our bodies?"

"Yes, monsieur, most assuredly," replied M. de Bonneville, "if it were a matter of fighting; but just at present we are thinking only of flight, and the less numerous we are, the simpler and surer will be our escape."

"Consider, comte!" said Gaspard,¹ frowning; "you are assuming with your twenty-two years, the whole responsibility of a very precious trust."

"My devotion has been deemed worthy of it, monsieur," replied the comte, haughtily, "and I will strive to justify the confidence with which I am honored."

Petit-Pierre, who had thus far stood silently in the midst of the little party, thought that it was high time for him to interpose.

"Fie!" said he, "is the matter of providing for the safety of a poor little peasant to become a brand of discord among the noblest champions of the cause of which you were just speaking? I see that it is necessary for me to give my opinion, for we have no time to waste in useless discussion. But first of all, my friends," he continued in a voice instinct with affection and gratitude, "I want to ask your pardon for the incognito which I

¹ Those of our readers who desire the key to the names, may consult the interesting work of General Dermoncourt: "*La Vendée et Madame*."

thought it my duty to assume with you, and which had only the single purpose of enabling me to learn your inmost thoughts, and your real opinions, so that I need have no reason to think that you tried to gratify what you knew to be my most heartfelt desire. And now that Petit-Pierre has informed himself sufficiently, the Regent will take part in the deliberations of the council. But, meanwhile, let us separate; the poorest hovel will content me for the balance of the night, and M. le Comte de Bonneville, who knows every inch of the country, can find me such a place."

"But when shall we be permitted to confer directly with her Royal Highness?" asked Pascal, with a respectful inclination.

"As soon as her Royal Highness finds a palace for her wandering majesty, Petit-Pierre will summon you to her side; that time will soon come. Petit-Pierre is determined never to abandon his friends."

"Petit-Pierre is a fine fellow!" cried Gaspard, joyfully, "and his friends will prove, I trust, that they are worthy of him."

"Farewell, then," rejoined Petit-Pierre. "And now that the incognito is laid aside, I thank your loyal heart, my good Gaspard, for having divined it so soon. Come, it's time to exchange a grasp of the hand and part."

Each of the gentlemen in turn took Petit-Pierre's hand, and kissed it respectfully. Each then took the direction agreed upon, and they were soon hidden by the windings of the narrow road, some to the right, others to the left.

Bonneville and Petit-Pierre were left alone.

"And we?" the latter asked.

"We will take a course diametrically opposite to theirs."

"Come, then, let's be off without losing a moment!" said Petit-Pierre, hurrying away in the direction indicated.

"One moment! wait a moment!" cried Bonneville.
"Oh, not that way, please! Your Highness must —"

"Bonneville! Bonneville!" said Petit-Pierre, "you forget our agreement."

"True; I beg Madame to pardon me!"

"Again! Oh, you're incorrigible!"

"Petit-Pierre must allow me to take him on my shoulders."

"Indeed, very gladly! See, there's a rock which looks as if it were put there for the purpose. Come, come, comte."

Petit-Pierre was already on top of the rock, and as the young comte approached he placed himself astride his shoulders.

"Upon my word you do it very well," said Bonneville, taking up his march.

"*Parbleu!*" said Petit-Pierre, "'saddle my nag' is a very good game, and I used to enjoy playing it in my childhood."

"A good education is never wasted, you see," said Bonneville.

"Tell me, comte, it's not against the rule for me to talk, is it?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then, as you are an old Chouan, while I am just entering on my apprenticeship to the craft, do you tell me why I am on your shoulders?"

"What an inquisitive fellow this Petit-Pierre is!" said Bonneville.

"No, I'm not; didn't I take my seat here at your first invitation, and without stopping to discuss, although

the position is a little undignified, you must confess, for a princess of the House of Bourbon."

"A princess of the House of Bourbon!" exclaimed Bonneville; "what's that, and where do you see a princess of the House of Bourbon?"

"You're quite right. Well, then, why is Petit-Pierre, who can walk and run and leap ditches, perched on the shoulders of his friend Bonneville, who can do neither the one nor the other so long as he has Petit-Pierre on his shoulders?"

"Well, I'll tell you; it's because Petit-Pierre's foot is too small."

"Small, yes; but solidly put together!" retorted Petit-Pierre, as if his vanity were wounded.

"Yes; but for all that, it's too small not to be recognized."

"By whom?"

"Why, by those who will follow our trail, of course."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Madame, with a comical expression of disgust, "who would ever have thought that there would come a day, or a night, when I should regret that I had not the foot of Madame la Duchesse de —!"

"Poor Marquis de Souday!" said Bonneville, "what would he think, already disturbed by your evident familiarity with the court, to hear you speak so nonchalantly of a duchesse's foot?"

"Oh, that would be in my *rôle* of page!"

"I can very well see," Petit-Pierre continued after a moment's silence, "that your purpose is to destroy any trace of me; but, then, we can't go on like this forever. Saint Christopher himself would be used up by it; and sooner or later this accursed foot of mine will come in contact with some muddy spot which will retain its impression."

"We will see if we can't throw the dogs off the scent for a while at least," said Bonneville, turning off sharply to the left, from which direction came the sound of running water.

"Well, what are you doing now?" asked Petit-Pierre. "You will lose your way! The water's up to your knees."

"That's very true, but let them look for us now," said Bonneville, hurrying along in the bed of the stream.

"Aha, very clever!" said Petit-Pierre. "You missed your calling, Bonneville. You ought to have been brought up in the primeval woods, or in the pampas. It's sure enough, that if tracks are necessary to enable them to follow us, they will have some difficulty in finding any."

"Don't laugh; the man who is on our trail is thoroughly posted in all these tricks. He fought in Vendée at the time when Charette, although almost alone, was giving the Blues a terrible task."

"So much the better!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, "there will be some pleasure in a conflict with people who are worth the trouble."

Notwithstanding his assumed cheerfulness, Petit-Pierre fell into deep thought after he had spoken, while Bonneville struggled manfully along over the rolling stones and dead branches, which considerably interfered with his progress; he followed the bed of the stream for something like a quarter of an hour. He then reached the point where the stream emptied into another much larger one, the same which skirted the foot of the Viette des Biques.

Bonneville soon had the water up to his waist in this larger stream, and had to request Petit-Pierre to go up

one step higher, — that is to say, to sit on his head instead of on his shoulders, — if he wished to avoid the discomfort of wet feet; but at last the depth increased so that Bonneville, to his great regret, had to land, and make up his mind to follow along the bank of the little torrent.

But the fugitives fell from Charybdis upon Scylla; for the bank was a veritable wild-boar's stronghold, and was such a mass of tangled and twisted thorns and briars as to be quite impracticable.

Bonneville placed Petit-Pierre upon his feet, as he could no longer carry him on his head or shoulders.

Then he plunged boldly into the thicket, telling Petit-Pierre to follow him step by step; and in spite of the underbrush and the dense woods and the inky darkness, he kept a perfectly straight course, as none but those who have constant practice in woodcraft can do.

His course was so true that within fifty paces they fell in with one of the paths which are called "lines," and are cut out parallel to one another in the forests, partly to mark boundaries, and partly to facilitate the improvement of the land.

"This is something like!" said Petit-Pierre, who had had a hard time of it with the briars, many of which were as tall as himself; "here we can at least use our legs."

"Yes; and without leaving any traces behind us," said Bonneville, stamping upon the ground, which was dry and stony.

"The next thing," said Petit-Pierre, "is to know what direction to take now."

"Now that we have cut out a pretty piece of work for those who are tempted to follow us, we will go wherever you choose."

"You know that I have arranged to meet our friends from Paris at La Cloutière to-morrow evening."

"We can almost get to La Cloutière without leaving the woods, where we shall always be more secure than in the open country. I know a path which will take us to the forest of Touvois and Grandes Landes, to the west of which lies La Cloutière; but we cannot possibly do it to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because with the *détours* we are obliged to make, we shall have to travel six hours; which is much beyond your strength."

Petit-Pierre stamped his foot on the ground impatiently.

"A league this side of La Benaste," said Bonneville, "I know a farm-house where we shall be welcome, and can rest a while before finishing our journey."

"Let's be off, then; let's be off!" said Petit-Pierre; "but which way?"

"Let me go ahead," said Bonneville, "we will bear off to the right."

He suited the action to the word, and started off as resolutely as he had plunged into the briers on the edge of the brook.

Petit-Pierre followed close behind him. From time to time the comte halted to take his bearings, and give his young companion time to breathe; he warned him of every inequality of the ground, and every obstacle, with an accuracy which showed how familiar Machecoul forest was to him.

"You notice," he said, during one of these halts, "that we avoid the cart-paths."

"Yes; why do we do that?"

"Because they would certainly look for our trail there,

where the ground is soft and moist; while these narrow by-paths, less worn and not worked soft by wheels and horses' feet, are less likely to betray us."

"But it gives us farther to go, does it not?"

"Yes; but it's safer."

They plodded along for ten minutes in silence, when Bonneville halted and seized his companion's arm.

Petit-Pierre's first impulse was to ask what was the matter.

"Hush! speak very low," said Bonneville.

"What for?"

"Do you hear nothing?"

"No."

"I do; I hear voices."

"Where?"

"Over in that direction, some fifty paces or so; and I think I can also see a red light through the branches."

"Yes; I see that too."

"What does it mean?"

"That's what I want to know."

"The devil!"

"Perhaps it's charcoal-burners."

"No; this is not the month when they do their burning, and even if we were certain that they were charcoal-burners, I should prefer not to trust them; I have no right, being your guide, to take any chances."

"Do you know no other road?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What's your trouble, then?"

"I don't want to take it, except as a last resort."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because it takes us across a swamp."

"Pshaw, why, you can walk on the water like Saint Peter! Are n't you familiar with it?"

"I have shot snipe over it a hundred times, but always by daylight; it's a wretched turf-pit, where I have often come within an ace of drowning myself, even in the daytime."

"Let's take the risk, then, and go and see what that fire is. I confess that I should not be sorry for a chance to warm myself a bit."

"Stay here, while I reconnoitre."

"But —"

"Don't be afraid."

As he spoke Bonneville disappeared noiselessly in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHEREIN PETIT-PIERRE ENJOYS THE BEST MEAL
HE EVER ATE IN HIS LIFE.

PETIT-PIERRE, thus left alone, leaned against a tree, silent and motionless, with straining eyes, and ears on the alert for the slightest noise.

For five minutes he heard nothing, except a sort of buzzing which seemed to come from the direction of the light.

Suddenly a horse neighed loudly, and made him start. Almost at the same moment he heard a slight rustling in the underbrush, and a figure rose from the ground in front of him. It was Bonneville.

He failed to see Petit-Pierre standing close against the tree-trunk, and called him twice.

Petit-Pierre leaped toward him.

"Hurry! hurry!" exclaimed Bonneville, dragging the youth along.

"What 's the matter?"

"Not an instant to lose! Come! come!"

As they hastened along, he said, —

"A bivouac of chasseurs. If there had been only men, I might have warmed myself at the same fire without being seen or heard; but a horse got scent of me, and neighed."

"Yes. I heard him."

"Not a word, then, you understand! Make the best possible use of your legs; that 's all."

Without exchanging another word, they ran along for five hundred yards. Then Bonneville drew his companion into the brush.

"Now get a little breath," said he.

While Petit-Pierre was obeying that injunction, Bonneville tried to make out their whereabouts.

"Are we lost?" asked Petit-Pierre, anxiously.

"Oh, there's no danger!" said Bonneville. "I am just trying to devise some way of avoiding that infernal swamp."

"If it will shorten our journey, let us take it," said Petit-Pierre.

"We shall have to, for I see no other way."

"*En route*, then," said Petit-Pierre; "but do you lead the way?"

Bonneville made no reply, but started off again at once; and instead of pursuing the same course as before, he veered off to the right through the bushes.

In about ten minutes the trees became more scattered and the darkness less profound. They were on the edge of the forest, and could hear the reeds rustling in the wind in front of them.

"Ah," said Petit-Pierre, recognizing the sound, "I should say that we have arrived."

"Yes," replied Bonneville, "and I will not undertake to conceal from you that this is the most critical moment of the whole night."

As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a knife, which, if need were, might pass for a poniard, and cut down a sapling which he stripped of its leaves and twigs, taking great care to hide the *débris*.

"Now, my poor Petit-Pierre," said he, "you must resign yourself to resuming your perch on my shoulders."

Petit-Pierre did on the instant as his guide asked, and the latter plunged into the swamp.

His progress, burdened as he was, and embarrassed by the long pole which he held in his hand and with which he felt his footing at every step, was horribly difficult.

Often he sunk into the mud up to his knees; and the ground, which seemed soft and yielding enough when he put his feet into it, offered a very sturdy resistance when he undertook to pull them out. He had the very greatest difficulty in extricating himself, time and time again; it was as if the gulf which opened under his feet was loth to give up its prey.

"Let me give you a little advice, my dear comte," said Petit-Pierre.

Bonneville halted, and wiped his forehead.

"If, instead of splashing around in that mud, you were to tread on the tufts of rushes which I seem to see here and there, I think you would find better footing."

"Yes," said Bonneville, "that is quite true; but we should also leave more distinct traces. But no matter!" he continued, after a moment's reflection, "you are right; that will be much the better way."

The long roots of the reeds had united to form little islands, a foot or so in width, which were scattered about over the shifting, treacherous surface of the bog, and afforded footholds of some consistency.

But from time to time, weighted down as he was by Petit-Pierre, the comte missed his mark, slipped, and recovered himself only with the greatest difficulty. And this process soon exhausted his strength so completely that he had to beg Petit-Pierre to get down, and give him an opportunity to rest awhile.

"Why, you're completely played out, my poor Bonneville.. Is there much more of this swamp of yours?"

"We have still two or three hundred feet of it to get over somehow; then we will take to the woods again till we get to the Benaste path, which will take us straight to our farmhouse."

"Can you hold out as far as that?"

"I hope so."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* what would I not give to be able to take my turn at carrying you, or at least to walk beside you."

These words brought back all the comte's strength. He abandoned the second method of operation, and resolutely took to the mud again. But the farther he advanced, the softer and more shifting the soil became.

Suddenly he made a false step and put his foot on a spot which he had not had time to try; and immediately he felt himself rapidly sinking, and in a fair way to disappear altogether.

"If I sink out of sight," he said, "throw yourself off to one side or the other; the dangerous spot is never wide."

Petit-Pierre at once leaped off, not to save himself, but to relieve Bonneville of the killing weight.

"Oh, my friend!" he cried, in agony, while tears rolled down his cheeks, at the sublime exclamation of devotion and self-sacrifice, "think of yourself, I command you!"

The young comte was already in the mud up to his waist. Fortunately he had the time and self-possession to throw his pole across so that each end rested on one of the hummocks, which afforded a sufficient support. Thanks to that and the assistance of Petit-Pierre, who seized his coat-collar, he succeeded in extricating himself from that perilous situation.

Soon thereafter the ground became firmer. The black line of the woods, which contracted the horizon, seemed nearer and more distinct; the fugitives had reached the end of the bog.

"At last!" exclaimed Bonneville.

"Ouf!" said Petit-Pierre, sliding down to the ground as soon as he felt that his companion's feet were on the firm earth; "ouf! you must be altogether done up, my dear comte."

"No; my breath is all gone, that's all."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Petit-Pierre, "to think that I have nothing to restore your strength, not even the gourd of the soldier or pilgrim, not even the beggar's crust!"

"Nonsense!" said the comte. "I don't get my strength from my stomach."

"Tell me whence you do get it, then, my dear comte; I will try to do as you do."

"Are you hungry?"

"I confess that I think I could eat a little something."

"Alas!" said the comte, "how you make me regret my thoughtlessness in neglecting to provide for this contingency."

Petit-Pierre began to laugh, and undertook to enliven his companion and restore his courage by joking with him.

"Bonneville," said he, "call the usher, and tell him to tell the chamberlain to order the officers of the cuisine to bring me whatever is in the larder. I should be glad to taste a few of the snipe whose cries I have just been hearing almost under my feet."

"Her royal Highness is served," said the comte, putting his knee on the ground and offering, on the crown of his hat, an object which Petit-Pierre seized upon with avidity.

"Bread!" he cried.

"Black bread," said Bonneville.

"Pshaw! in the night no one can see what color it is."

"But it's dry bread, — dry as a stone."

"It's bread, all the same," rejoined Petit-Pierre, valiantly attacking the crust which had been hardening two days in Bonneville's pocket.

"And when I think," said he, "that General Derroncourt is eating my supper at Souday at this moment, it's maddening, is n't it?"

"But pardon me, my dear guide," he added suddenly; "my stomach has so got the upper hand of my heart that I entirely forgot to offer you half of my supper."

"Thanks," replied Bonneville; "my appetite has n't yet reached that point where I can eat pebbles. But in return for your kind offer, I will show you what you must do to make your poor supper a little more palatable."

He took the bread, broke it into small pieces, not without difficulty, and dipped them in a spring a few feet away. Then he called Petit-Pierre; and, as they sat on opposite sides of the spring, he took out the soaked and softened crusts one after another and handed them to his famished comrade.

"On my faith," said the latter, as he swallowed the last crumb, "I have not supped so well for twenty years! Bonneville, I appoint you my major-domo."

"Meanwhile," said the comte, "I am once more your guide. Enough of such dissipation as this; let us resume our travels."

"I am ready," said Petit-Pierre, rising gayly to his feet.

They struck out again through the woods, and in half an hour's time came to a stream which they must cross.

Bonneville adopted his ordinary method of procedure, but at the first step which he took in the water it rose to his waist. At the second he was in up to his neck, and Petit-Pierre's legs were thoroughly drenched.

Bonneville, who felt that he was being carried off his feet by the current, seized the branch of a tree, and succeeded in getting back to the bank. They were obliged to seek for a fordable spot.

About three hundred feet down stream, Bonneville thought he had found such a spot; it was where a tree had fallen across the stream, and lay there still covered with leaves.

"Do you think you can walk across on that?" he asked.

"If you can, I can," replied Petit-Pierre.

"Cling to the branches, and don't think about appearances. Don't raise one foot until you are sure that the other is solidly planted," said Bonneville, crawling along the trunk.

"I am to follow you, am I not?"

"Wait a moment; I will give you my hand."

"Here I am! *Mon Dieu!* what a quantity of things one must know for travelling across country. I never imagined anything like it."

"Don't talk, for God's sake! Look closely after your feet. One moment! don't come any farther. Here's a branch which will bother you; I will cut it."

As the comte stooped to do as he said, he heard a stifled cry behind him, followed by a splash as of a body falling into the water.

He turned his head; Petit-Pierre had disappeared.

Without losing a second, Bonneville plunged in at the same place; and as good luck would have it, when he reached the bottom of the stream, which was there

some seven or eight feet deep, his hand came in contact with his comrade's leg.

He seized it, and with his brain in a whirl, trembling with emotion, and heedless of the decidedly disagreeable position in which he was holding the unfortunate youth, with two strokes he reached the bank of the stream which was luckily no wider than it was deep.

Petit-Pierre gave no sign of life.

Bonneville took him in his arms and laid him upon the dry leaves, calling him by name and shaking him; but he lay mute and motionless.

Bonneville tore his hair in his desperation.

"Oh, it's my fault! it's my fault!" he muttered. "My God, Thou punishest me for my pride! I took too much upon myself when I made myself responsible for his safety. Oh, my life, *mon Dieu*, for a sigh, a breath, a gasp!"

The fresh night air did more to restore Petit-Pierre to consciousness than all Bonneville's lamentations. In a few moments he opened his eyes and sneezed.

Bonneville, who was in a very paroxysm of grief, and was vowing that he would not survive him of whose death he had been the cause, uttered a joyful cry, and fell on his knees before Petit-Pierre, who had come to himself sufficiently to understand the young man's last words.

"Bonneville," said he, "you didn't say 'God bless you!' when I sneezed. I am going to have a fine cold in my head!"

"Living! living!" cried Bonneville, as expansive in his joy as he had been in his sorrow.

"Yes, living indeed, thanks to you! If you were another, I would swear never to forget you."

"You are wet to the skin, *mon Dieu!*"

"Yes, my shoes especially are soaked. It trickles down, Bonneville, it trickles down in a very disagreeable way."

"And we have no fire, and no means of building one."

"Never mind! we will warm ourselves up with walking. I speak in the plural; for you must be as wet as I am, poor fellow, after your three baths, including one of mud!"

"Oh, don't think about me! Can you walk?"

"I think so, when I have emptied my shoes."

Bonneville assisted him to rid himself of the water with which his shoes were filled. He took off his coarse coat, and squeezed that as dry as he could before he replaced it; then, the twofold operation at an end, he said, —

"And now for La Benaste, at double quick."

"What do you say, Bonneville," said Petit-Pierre, "that fire that we took so much pains to avoid would go very well now, eh?"

"But we could not run our heads into the noose," said the comte, in despair.

"Come, come, don't take my reflection for a reproach. Oh, what a bad disposition you have! Come, forward, forward! Since I have put my legs in motion, it seems as if my clothes were drying up; in ten minutes I shall be perspiring."

Bonneville did not need to be urged; he pushed on so rapidly that Petit-Pierre had hard work to follow him, and from time to time was obliged to remind him that their legs were of very unequal lengths.

But the comte was still under the influence of the deep emotion which his young comrade's accident had caused him; and the finishing touch was put to his

confusion when he found that he had lost his way among the thickets which seemed, nevertheless, so familiar to him.

Time after time as he took a new path he stopped to look about him, and as often, with a shake of the head, set off again in a sort of frenzy.

At last Petit-Pierre, who was obliged to run to overtake him, said to him, when he seemed to hesitate again,—

“ Well, my dear comte, what ’s the trouble? ”

“ The trouble is that I am a miserable wretch who presumed too much upon my knowledge of the neighborhood, and that — and that — ”

“ And that we are lost? ”

“ I ’m afraid so! ”

“ Well, I ’m sure of it; here ’s a branch which I broke off a little while ago. We have passed this spot already, and are travelling in a circle. You see, I am profiting by your teaching,” said Petit-Pierre, triumphantly.

“ Ah,” said Bonneville, “ I see what put me wrong! ”

“ What was it? ”

“ When I came out of the water I went ashore on the same side we came from, and I was so upset that I did n’t notice it.”

“ So that our bath was entirely useless,” said Petit-Pierre, laughing aloud.

“ Oh, don’t laugh like that, madame, I beg you!” said Bonneville; “ your gayety breaks my heart.”

“ That may be; but it helps to keep me warm.”

“ Are you cold? ”

“ A little; but that ’s not the worst.”

“ What do you mean? ”

“ There was a whole half-hour that you did n’t dare

to confess that we were lost, and for the same length of time I have been afraid to tell you that my legs seem decidedly inclined to refuse to do their duty."

"What will become of us, then?"

"Well, am I to be compelled to take your place as a man, and inspire you with courage? Come, the council is open; what is your opinion?"

"That it is impossible to reach La Benaste to-night."

"Then what?"

"We must try to reach the nearest farmhouse before daybreak."

"Can you tell where you are?"

"There are no stars and no moon."

"And no compass," suggested Petit-Pierre, trying to restore his comrade's spirit with a mild joke.

"Wait."

"Ah, you have an idea, I'm sure!"

"At five o'clock last evening, I happened by chance to glance at the vanes on the château. The wind was from the east."

He moistened his finger and held it in the air.

"What are you doing?"

"Making a vane."

"That's the north," he said, unhesitatingly, after a moment. "By walking with our face to the wind we shall come out in the open near Saint Philbert."

"Yes, by walking; that's just the difficulty."

"Do you want me to try to carry you in my arms?"

"Nonsense! you have quite enough to do to carry yourself, my poor Bonneville."

Petit-Pierre rose with an effort. While they talked he had seated himself, or let himself fall, at the foot of a tree.

"There!" said he; "now I'm on my feet. I choose

that these rebellious legs of mine shall go forward, and I propose to subdue them, like all rebels; I am here for that purpose."

The brave-hearted creature took four or five steps; but he was so utterly weary, and his limbs so stiffened by the cold bath he had had, that he staggered and almost fell.

Bonneville darted forward to support him.

"*Cordieu!*" he cried; "leave me, Monsieur de Bonneville. I wish that this wretched body, which God has made so frail and weak, were but on a level with the heart which it encloses! Don't offer it any assistance or succor, comte. Ah, you stagger, do you? Ah, you bend and break, you miserable legs! Very well; hereafter you are not to take your regular gait, but the double quick. And, in a fortnight, I propose that you shall be trained to execute whatever my will requires with the submission of a beast of burden!"

Suiting his action to his words, Petit-Pierre started off at such a rapid pace that his guide had some difficulty in overtaking him.

But this last effort used him up; and when Bonneville succeeded in coming up with him, he found him seated again, with his face buried in his hands.

He was weeping even more with rage than with pain.

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" he muttered; "Thou hast set me a giant's task, and hast given me no more than a woman's strength."

Thereupon Bonneville, without a word, took Petit-Pierre in his arms, and began to run in his turn..

The words Gaspard had said to him as they came out of the underground passage were ringing in his ears.

He felt that that delicate frame could not endure such

violent shocks much longer, and he had determined to do his utmost to place the treasure which had been entrusted to him in a place of safety.

He felt that the loss of a moment might jeopardize his comrade's precious life.

The gallant youth maintained his rapid pace for nearly quarter of an hour. His hat fell off, but he had ceased to worry about the traces he might leave, and he did not stop to pick it up; he felt Petit-Pierre shivering in his arms; he heard his teeth chattering with cold, and the sound spurred him on, as the shouts of the crowd spur on a race horse and give him superhuman strength.

But little by little, his factitious energy faded away; his legs ceased to obey him except mechanically; the blood settled in his brain, and made him dizzy; his heart felt swollen to bursting; his breath rattled in his throat; cold sweat bathed his forehead; his veins were throbbing as if his head would split in two; from time to time a thick mist swam before his blood-shot eyes. Soon he slipped on the slightest incline, staggered and tripped over the smallest obstacle; his knees gave way and seemed powerless to straighten themselves out again, and his progress was painfully slow and labored.

"Stop! stop! Monsieur de Bonneville!" cried Petit-Pierre; "stop, I command you!"

"No, no! I will not stop," replied Bonneville; "I have some strength left, thank God! and I will use it to the last drop. Stop! stop! when we are in sight of land, when, by the expenditure of a little more effort, I shall see you in a safe shelter! Stop, when we are almost at the end of our journey! Look, look, I tell you!"

In truth, at the far end of the track they were following, there appeared a broad band of red, rising slowly

above the horizon, and against it the sharp straight lines of a building of some sort stood out in bold relief.

The day was beginning to break, and they were approaching the open country.

But just as Bonneville uttered his cry of joy, his legs gave way, he tottered and fell upon his knees; his body fell gently backward, as if he had devoted the last supreme effort of his will, as his consciousness fled, to save him whom he held in his arms from the dangers of a fall.

Petit-Pierre disengaged himself from his arms, to find himself on his feet, but so weak and trembling that he was little better off than his companion.

He tried to raise the comte, but failed. Bonneville then made an effort to put his hands to his mouth, doubtless to give the ordinary rallying-cry of the Chouans, but his breath failed him; he had just strength enough to say to Petit-Pierre, "don't forget," when he fainted.

The house they had seen was hardly more than seven or eight hundred feet from the spot where Bonneville had fallen, and Petit-Pierre resolved to go thither and ask help for his friend at any risk.

So he made a mighty effort, and hurried off in the direction of the house.

As he was passing a place where four paths came together, he saw a man walking on one of the paths, away from him.

He called, but the man did not even turn his head.

Then Petit-Pierre, whether by a sudden inspiration, or because of Bonneville's last words, turned to good use the lessons the comte had given him, by putting his hands to his mouth, and imitating the cry of the brown owl.

The man at once turned about, and came back to Petit-Pierre.

"My friend," cried the youth, when he was within hearing of his voice, "if you want gold you shall have it; but first, in God's name, come and help me save a poor fellow who is dying!"

Thereupon with all the strength he could summon to his aid, and sure that the stranger would follow him, he hurried back to Bonneville, and raised his head from the ground with a painful effort.

The comte was still unconscious.

As soon as the new-comer cast his eye upon the body as it lay in the path, he exclaimed,—

"You don't need to promise me gold, to induce me to do my best to help M. le Comte de Bonneville."

Petit-Pierre looked at the man more closely.

"Jean Oullier!" he ejaculated, recognizing the Marquis de Souday's keeper by the first rays of the breaking dawn,— "Jean Oullier, can you find a place of shelter near by for my friend and myself?"

The keeper had no need to consider his reply.

"There is no house but that within half a league," said he.

He uttered these words with evident repugnance, but Petit-Pierre either failed to notice it, or chose to ignore it.

"You must help me carry him there," said he.

"To that house?" asked Jean.

"Yes; are n't the people who live there royalists?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Come, I put our lives in your hands, Jean Oullier, and I know that my confidence is not misplaced."

Jean Oullier put Bonneville, still in a deathly swoon, upon his shoulders, took Petit-Pierre by the hand, and walked toward the house which was no other than that of Joseph Picaut and his sister-in-law.

Jean climbed the fence, as lightly as if he had had nothing but his game-bag on his back, instead of the Comte de Bonneville; in the orchard he went forward with some precaution.

Everything was quiet in Joseph Picaut's abode, but it was not so in the widow's portion of the house; there was a light there, and a shadow passed back and forth between it and the window.

Between the two Jean soon made up his mind.

"Faith, considering everything, I much prefer this," he said to himself, marching boldly up toward Pascal's door, which he opened.

Pascal's body lay stretched upon the bed.

The widow had lighted two candles, and was praying at the side of her dead.

As she heard the door turning on its hinges, she rose.

"Widow Pascal," said Oullier, without laying down his burden, or releasing Petit-Pierre's hand, "I saved your life last night at the Viette des Biques."

Marianne stared at him in amazement, and as if trying to remember.

"You don't believe me?"

"Yes, Jean, I believe you; I know that you are not the man to tell a falsehood, even to save your life; besides I heard the shot, and mistrusted what hand fired it."

"Widow Pascal, do you want to avenge your husband, and make your fortune at one stroke? I bring you the means."

"How so?"

"These," pursued Jean Oullier, "are Madame la Duchesse de Berry, and M. le Comte de Bonneville, who would both have died of fatigue and hunger if I

had not come to ask you to give them shelter; here they are! ”

The widow seemed stupefied, but was also visibly interested.

“This head which you see,” continued Jean, “is worth its weight in gold; you can denounce it, if you think best, and as I said, your husband is avenged, and your fortune made.”

“Jean Oullier,” said the widow, gravely, “God has commanded us to have charity for all, great and small. If two unfortunates come to my door, I will not turn them away; if two who are proscribed come and ask me for shelter, the walls of my house may crumble before I will betray them.”

With a simple gesture, to which her words lent an almost sublime grandeur, she added:—

“Jean Oullier, come in, with your companions; come in without fear.”

They entered the house, and while Petit-Pierre was assisting Oullier to place M. de Bonneville upon a chair, the old keeper whispered to him:—

“Madame, look out for those blonde locks of yours, which are peeping out from under your wig; it would not be best for everybody to know the fact which I guessed from seeing them, and which I have told this good woman.”

CHAPTER XL.

EQUALITY IN FACE OF THE DEAD.

THE same day about two in the afternoon Master Courtin left La Logerie, on the pretext that he was going to Machecoul to buy an ox, but really with a view of learning something about the events of the night, in which, as the reader will easily understand, the worthy functionary felt a most particular interest.

When he reached the ford of Pont-Farcy he found the miller's lads just about to carry away poor Tinguy, surrounded by a number of women and children who were gazing at the body with the curiosity inherent in their sex and their youth.

When the mayor of La Logerie, urging his nag with a blow of his leather-handled cudgel, rode him into the stream, all eyes were turned in his direction, and the conversation, which had been up to that time extremely animated, stopped as if by enchantment.

"Well, what's the matter, boys?" asked Courtin, heading his horse diagonally across the stream so as to land just where the group was collected.

"A dead man," one of the millers answered, with the characteristic laconicism of the Vendean peasant.

Courtin cast his eye on the corpse and saw that it was clad in a uniform.

"Luckily it's no one from the neighborhood," said he.

In spite of his Philippist opinions the mayor of La Logerie did not think it prudent to display his sympathy with a soldier of Louis Philippe.

"That's where you're mistaken, Monsieur Courtin," gloomily retorted a man in a brown coat.

The title of "monsieur," which was bestowed upon him with some emphasis, in no wise flattered the farmer; in his then situation, and in view of the state of the country, he knew that the word "monsieur," in the mouth of a peasant, when it was not a mark of respect, was equal to an insult or a threat, and as the mayor of La Logerie was not foolish enough to take the appellation as having the first signification, he was considerably disconcerted by it, and resolved to be more circumspect than ever.

"Why, I should say that that's a chasseur's uniform," he continued in very mild tones.

"Pshaw! what's the uniform got to do with it?" replied the same peasant; "as if you didn't know that the '*man-hunt*,'" so the Vendéans named the draft, "does n't respect our sons and brothers any more than other people's; surely you ought to know it, being mayor."

Again there was silence; it seemed so embarrassing to Courtin that he broke it.

"Does any one know the name of the poor fellow who met such a wretched death?" asked Courtin, making frantic but unfruitful efforts to coax a tear to his eye.

No one answered. The silence became more and more expressive.

"Is it known whether there are any other victims? Among our people,— I mean among the neighbors,— were any killed? I heard it said that quite a number of shots were fired."

"As to other victims," it was still the same peasant who replied, "I know of none but that one there; but it would be almost a sin to speak of it in the same breath with the body of a Christian."

As he spoke, the peasant, keeping his eyes fixed upon Courtin, turned so as to point his finger at the dead body of Jean Oullier's dog, which lay partly on the bank and partly in the stream, which moved it gently up and down.

Courtin turned pale, and coughed as if an invisible hand were upon his throat.

"What's that?" he faltered. "A dog! Ah, if we had none but victims of that kind to weep over, we might keep our tears for another occasion!"

"What do you say?" exclaimed the brown-coated man. "The blood of a dog must be paid for like everything else, Monsieur Courtin; and I am sure that poor Pataud's master won't soon forgive the man who fired on his dog—just as he left Montaigne—with wolf-shot, three of which entered his body."

With that the man—as if he thought he had exchanged words enough with Courtin, and it was not worth while to await his reply—turned on his heel, climbed a fence, and went out of sight behind a hedge.

The miller's men took up their march with the corpse, while the women and children followed the procession, praying excitedly and in a loud voice.

Courtin was left alone.

"All right!" said the worthy mayor, digging his spurs into his nag, which seemed to enjoy the halt. "Before I pay what *gars* Oullier has charged to my account, it will be necessary for him to get free from the claws which are now fastened in him, thanks to me. He won't find that very easy; although, strictly speaking, it may be possible."

Master Courtin pursued his journey. But his curiosity was aroused more and more, and it seemed to him

a long while to wait to satisfy it until the moderate pace of his steed should bring him to Machecoul.

At that moment he was passing the cross-roads of La Bertaudière, whence one of the roads led to the Picaut cottage.

He thought of Pascal, who would be better able than any one to tell him the news, as he was to have guided the soldiers the night before.

"What an ass I am!" he soliloquized. "Without going more than half an hour out of my way, I can find out all about what happened from a mouth which will not keep anything back. Let's go and see Pascal; he will tell me the result of my bold stroke."

So Master Courtin turned to the right, and five minutes later he came out at the little orchard and rode into the yard before the abode of the Picauts.

Joseph, seated on a saw-horse, was smoking his pipe in front of his part of the house. When he saw the mayor he did not think it worth while to disturb himself.

Master Courtin, who was extremely clever in the art of seeing everything without seeming to notice it, tied his nag to one of the iron rings set in the wall.

"Is your brother at home?" he then inquired of Joseph.

"Yes; he's there *still*," replied Picaut, dwelling upon the "still" with an expression which seemed strange to the worthy official. "Do you need him to-day to guide the Red Breeches to the Château de Souday?"

Courtin bit his lips and made no audible reply, but muttered to himself, —

"How did that fool Pascal ever come to tell his rascal of a brother that I gave him that job? 'Pon my word,

one can't do anything these days that every one is n't chattering about it."

Meanwhile he had knocked at the door of the younger Picaut, but was so interested in his monologue that he failed to notice how slow they were in opening, or that the door was bolted on the inside, contrary to the trustful habits of the countryfolk.

At last the door was opened.

When Courtin's eyes looked in through the opening, he saw a sight for which he was entirely unprepared, and which made him recoil.

"Who is dead here, in God's name?" he demanded.

"Look and see," said the widow, without leaving her place in the chimney-corner, which she had resumed after opening the door.

Courtin turned his eyes once more to the bed; and although he could see nought but the shape of the body beneath the sheet, he divined everything.

"Pascal!" he ejaculated; "Pascal!"

"I thought you knew it," said the widow.

"I?"

"Yes, you,—you who were the real cause of his death!"

"I?—I?" repeated Courtin, remembering what the victim's brother had just said to him, and feeling how important it was for him to clear his skirts. "I? I swear to you on my word as a man that it's more than a week since I laid eyes on your husband."

"Don't swear," replied the widow. "Pascal never swore; for he never lied, you know."

"Yes; but who told you that I had seen him?" demanded Courtin. "A pretty good one that is, on my word!"

"Don't lie in the presence of a dead man, Mon-

sieur Courtin," said Marianne; "it will bring you bad luck."

"I am not lying," faltered the farmer.

"He left here to call upon you. You induced him to act as guide to the soldiers."

Courtin renewed his gestures of denial.

"Oh, it is n't that I blame you!" continued the widow, gazing earnestly at a little peasant of some twenty-five or thirty years, who was plying her distaff in the other corner of the fireplace. "It was his duty to lend assistance to those who aim to prevent the country from being ravaged by civil war again."

"That is my aim too,—my only aim," rejoined Courtin, lowering his voice so that the young peasant might not hear what he said. "I wish that the Government would rid us for good and all of these fomenters of trouble,—these nobles who crush us with their riches in time of peace, and put us forward to be killed when war comes. I am working to that end, Mistress Picaut; but I must n't boast, for we know only too well what such people are capable of."

"What have you to complain of if they do strike you from behind, when you attack them in underhand ways?" said Marianne, scornfully.

"*Dame!* one dares do what one can do, Mistress Picaut," rejoined Courtin, in some embarrassment. "It is n't given to everybody to be as bold and brave as your poor departed was. But we will avenge him, poor Pascal! Yes; we'll avenge him, I swear to you!"

"Thanks; but I don't need you for that, Monsieur Courtin," said the widow, almost threateningly, so harsh was her tone. "You have already meddled overmuch in the affairs of this poor house. Hereafter keep your good-will for others."

"As you please, Mistress Picaut. Alas, I was so attached to your poor, dear man that I would do anything to please you."

Suddenly he turned toward the little peasant, whom he had been looking at out of the corner of his eye for some moments without appearing to see her.

"Pray, who's that young woman?" he inquired.

"A cousin of mine, who came this morning from Port Saint Père to help me render the last sad duties to poor Pascal, and to keep me company."

"From Port Saint Père this morning? Ah, Mistress Picaut, she must be a fast walker, and have wasted very little time on the way!"

The poor widow, little accustomed to lying, — because she never had any reason to lie, — lied very bunglingly. She bit her lips and cast an angry glance at Courtin, who, luckily, did not catch it, as he was busy at that moment examining a complete peasant's outfit which was drying before the fire.

The portions of the costume which seemed to interest Courtin most were a pair of shoes and a shirt. To be sure, the shoes, although hob-nailed, were of a shape and material not very common in cottages, while the shirt was of the very finest linen imaginable.

"Fine linen! fine linen!" muttered the farmer, rubbing the soft stuff between his hands. "It's my opinion that it won't roughen the skin of the man who wears it."

The young peasant thought it high time to come to the rescue of the widow, who acted as if she were sitting on thorns, and whose forehead was darkened by clouds, which grew momentarily more menacing.

"Yes," said she, "those are some things I bought of a second-hand dealer at Nantes to cut up into night-shirts for my cousin Pascal's little nephew."

"And you washed them before having them made over. And, faith, you did well too, my pretty girl! For one never knows, after all," said Courtin, gazing more fixedly at the peasant, "who has worn slop-shop clothes; it may have been a prince, and it may have been a man with the itch."

"Master Courtin," interposed Marianne, apparently more and more annoyed by the turn the conversation had taken, "it seems to me I hear your horse fretting at the door."

Courtin stopped to listen.

"If I did n't hear your brother-in-law walking about in the garret over our heads," said he, "I should say that he was probably bothering him, the rascal!"

At this new demonstration of the essentially observing mind of the mayor of La Logerie, it was the young peasant's turn to lose the color from her cheeks; and her pallor became more marked when she heard Courtin, who had risen to look at his horse through the window, say, as if to himself, —

"But no; he's still out there, the villain! It is him teasing my beast with his whip-lash."

"Pray, who's up in your attic, mistress?" said he, addressing the widow again.

The spinner was about to reply that Joseph had a wife and children, and that both families used the attic in common; but the widow gave her no time to begin.

"Master Courtin," said she, rising, "is n't it about time for your questions to end? I hate spies — I give you fair warning — whether they're Red or White!"

"Since when has an innocent little talk between friends been deemed spying, La Picaut? Bah, you're very sensitive all of a sudden!"

The young peasant's eyes implored the widow to be

more prudent, but the impetuous creature could not contain herself.

"Between friends, between friends?" she repeated. "Oh, go seek your friends among those who resemble you, — traitors, that is to say, and cowards, — and know that Pascal Picaut's widow will never be one of them! Go, and leave us to our grief, which you have intruded upon too long already!"

"Yes, yes," retorted Courtin, with perfectly simulated good-humor, "my presence is hateful to you. I ought to have understood it sooner, and I ask your pardon for not having done so. You persist in seeing in me the cause of the death of your poor man. Oh, that pains me, pains me terribly, mistress! For I was very fond of him, and I would n't have injured him for a great deal. But all right, since you really wish it, — since you drive me out, — I will go; I will go! Don't take on like that."

At this moment the widow, whose preoccupation seemed to increase, called the young peasant's attention, with a swift glance, to a kneading-trough which stood behind the door.

Upon this trough a portfolio lay open, — evidently overlooked. It was, no doubt, the same which had been used in writing the order which Jean Oullier had carried to the Marquis de Souday that morning. It consisted of a sort of pocket of green morocco, which rolled up around a pasteboard cylinder, the latter serving as a receptacle for writing materials.

As he went toward the door, Courtin would not fail to see the portfolio and the papers scattered about on it.

The young peasant understood the glance, saw the danger, and before the mayor had turned, she passed behind him — light-footed as a fawn — and sat down

upon the trough in such a way as completely to hide the unlucky portfolio.

Courtin apparently took no notice of this manœuvre.

"Well, Mistress Picaut, farewell!" said he. "I have lost in your man a comrade to whom I was greatly attached. You doubt it, but the future will prove it. If any one annoys or injures you, you have only to hunt me up. Do you understand?"

The widow made no reply. She had said all that she had to say to Courtin, and paid no further attention to him. As he walked toward the door, she stood like a statue with folded arms gazing at the body, whose rigid form was outlined under the sheet which covered it.

"Hallo! you're over there, are you, my pretty child?" said Courtin, as he passed the peasant.

"Yes; I was too hot by the fire."

"Look well after your cousin, my girl," pursued Courtin. "That dead man has made a wild beast of her; she's as unsociable as the wolves of Machecoul! Spin away, spin away, my girl; but you'll twist your spindle and turn your bobbin a long while before your distaff will produce a thread as fine as that which went to the weaving of yonder shirt!"

At last he concluded to go out.

"What fine linen, what fine linen!" he said, as he closed the door behind him.

"Come, put away all those things! Quick! quick!" exclaimed the widow; "he has gone out only to come in again."

Quick as thought the young woman pushed the portfolio down between the wall and the kneading-trough; but, swift as her movements were, it was too late.

The shutter which formed the upper half of the door flew open suddenly, and Courtin's head appeared in the aperture.

"I frightened you? Excuse me," said Courtin; "my motive was good. Tell me, pray, when are the funeral services to be held?"

"To-morrow, I believe," replied the peasant.

"Will you ever go, you wicked knave?" cried the widow, rushing at Courtin, and brandishing above her the huge tongs used to handle the burning brands in the vast fireplace.

Courtin withdrew in terror; and Mistress Picaut, as he called her, closed the shutter violently.

La Logerie's worthy chief magistrate unhitched his nag, picked up a handful of straw and wiped off his saddle,—which Joseph had incited his children to befoul with cow-dung from pommel to cantle, with malice aforethought, and to inculcate in their minds his own hatred for such dogs.

That done without murmur or reproach, as if it had been a most natural occurrence, he bestrode his steed with a most indifferent air. He even stopped a long while in the orchard to examine the apple-trees, with the eye of a connoisseur. But as soon as he reached the cross-roads of La Bertaudière and headed his horse toward Machecoul, he took his stick by the big end, and using the leather thong on one side and his only spur on the other, he plied them both so furiously and persistently that he succeeded in urging his mount into a pace of which he had never been thought capable before.

"Well, he's gone at last!" said the young peasant, who had been watching all his movements from the window as he disappeared from sight.

"Yes; but perhaps we are none the better off for that, madame."

"How so?"

"Oh, I know what I'm talking about!"

"Do you suppose he has gone to denounce us?"

"He has the reputation of being quite capable of it. I know nothing of it personally, for I never meddle in their affairs; but his wicked manner always made me think that they probably say no more than the truth about him, even among the Whites."

"Indeed," said the younger woman, beginning to feel anxious, "his face did n't seem calculated to inspire confidence."

"Ah, madame, why in Heaven's name did n't you keep Jean Oullier with you?" said the widow. "That's an honest man, and a sure man."

"I had orders to send to the Château de Souday. Then, too, he is to bring us horses this evening, so that we may leave your house as soon as possible; for here I increase your grief, as well as embarrass and compromise you."

The widow made no reply; she was weeping, with her face hidden in her hands.

"Poor soul!" murmured the duchesse, "your tears fall, drop by drop, upon my heart, and every tear leaves a grievous wound. Alas, it is the fearful, the inevitable consequence of revolutionary movements! On the head of those who make them, all these tears and all this blood ought to fall."

"Would it not be, rather, upon the head of those who cause them, if God was just?" retorted the widow in a solemn voice, which made her interlocutor shudder.

"Do you hate us so bitterly, then?" asked the young peasant, sadly.

"Oh, yes; indeed I hate you!" replied the widow. "How do you suppose I can love you?"

"Alas! Yes, I understand; your husband's death —"

"No; you don't understand," said Marianne, shaking her head.

The peasant made a gesture which signified, "Explain yourself, then."

"No," said the widow; "it is not because the man who has been my whole life for fifteen years will be laid to rest to-morrow; it is not because, when I was a mere child, I was a witness of the massacres of L  g  , and under the shadow of your white flag saw my nearest and dearest murdered, and felt their blood upon my face; it is not because for ten years those who fought for your ancestors persecuted mine, burned their houses, and laid waste their fields, — no, I say again, it is not for those things that I hate you."

"Pray, then, why can it be?"

"It is because it seems impious to me that a family, a race, should undertake to substitute itself for God Almighty, — our only Master here below, whether we are great or small; that it should pretend that we were all made for it; that it should suppose that a tortured people has not the right to turn over upon its bed of pain without first asking leave. Now you belong to that selfish family, — that arrogant race! That's why I hate you!"

"And yet you gave me shelter. You forgot your sorrow to lavish attention upon my companion as well as myself. You robbed yourself of clothes to cover me, and you gave him the clothes of the poor dead man; for whose soul I pray here on earth, and who will, I trust, pray for me on high."

"All that will not prevent me, as soon as you have left my poor abode, and I have fulfilled all the duties of hospitality, from wishing earnestly that those who pursue you may overtake you."

"Why don't you give me up to them, if such are your sentiments?"

"Because they are less powerful than my respect for misfortune, than my regard for my oath, and my devotion to the demands of hospitality. Because I swore that you should be saved to-day. And then, too, partly because I hope that what you have seen here will not be a lesson thrown away, and that it may turn you aside from your plans; for you are human, and you are kind-hearted, I am sure."

"What could possibly induce me to renounce the projects I have been nursing for eighteen months?"

"This!" said the widow, as, with the swiftness and violence which characterized whatever she did, she snatched away the sheet which covered the body, exposing to view the livid face and the wounds surrounded by a great purple ring.

The young woman turned her head aside. The heroic firmness of which she had already given so many proofs, could not endure in face of that fearful spectacle.

"Consider, madame," urged the widow, "that before that which you are about to attempt can be accomplished, many poor fellows, whose only crime is their love for you, — many fathers, many sons, many brothers, — will lie, like him, upon their beds of death; that many mothers, many sisters, many widows, many orphan children will weep, as I do, for him who was their protector and their love!"

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" cried the young woman, sobbing bitterly, as she fell on her knees and raised her arms toward Heaven, "if we are in the wrong, if we must give an account of all the hearts we shall break —"

Her voice, broken with sobs, died away in a groan.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SEARCH.

AT this moment some one knocked at the trap-door leading to the attic.

"What's the matter, pray?" Bonneville's voice inquired.

He had heard something of what the widow was saying, and was disturbed by it.

"Nothing, nothing," replied the young peasant, pressing the hand of her hostess with affectionate energy, which sufficiently attested the impression the latter's words had produced upon her.

"But how is it with you?" she asked, in a different tone, ascending, in order to converse more readily, the first few steps of the ladder leading to the trap.

The trap was raised from above, and the young man's smiling face appeared.

"How are you getting on?" the peasant asked again.

"I am all ready to be at work again, when your interest requires," he replied.

She thanked him with a smile.

"Who was it who was here just now?" queried Bonneville.

"A peasant named Courtin, who is not exactly one of your friends, I'm afraid."

"Aha, the mayor of La Logerie?"

"That's the man."

"Yes," said Bonneville, "Michel spoke to me about him; he's a dangerous man. You ought to have had him followed."

"By whom? — we have no one."

"Why, our hostess's brother-in-law."

"You saw our good Oullier's dislike for him."

"Still, he's a White," cried the widow; "he's one of your Whites, — this brother who stood by and let them murder his brother."

The peasant and Bonneville made a simultaneous gesture of horror.

"In that case, we shall do very well not to have him mixed up in our affairs," said Bonneville; "he would bring us bad luck! But have n't you any one, my good woman, whom we can put on guard in the neighborhood?"

"Jean Oullier provided for that," replied the widow, "and I sent my nephew to Saint Pierre hill, where you can see all the surrounding country."

"He's a mere child," suggested the peasant.

"More reliable than some men," rejoined the widow.

"At the worst," said Bonneville, "we have n't long to wait; in three hours it will be dark, and then our horses and our friends will be here." -

"Three hours!" echoed the peasant, who had seemed absorbed in sad thoughts, since the widow's inspired words; "in three hours many things may happen, my poor Bonneville."

"Who's that running so hard?" cried Mistress Picaut, rushing from the window to the door, and throwing it open. "Is it you, little one?"

"Yes, aunt, yes," replied the child, breathlessly.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, aunt! aunt!" cried the little fellow, "the

soldiers, the soldiers! they are coming down there. They surprised and killed the man who was on the watch."

"The soldiers, the soldiers?" muttered Joseph Picaut, who had heard his son's cry from his door, and who hurried at once into his own house.

"What shall we do?" asked Bonneville.

"Wait and face them," said the young woman.

"Why not try to escape?"

"If the man who was just here is bringing them, or if it was he who directed them, the house is undoubtedly surrounded."

"Who speaks of escaping?" asked the widow Picaut. "Have n't I said that this house should be a sure refuge for you; have n't I sworn that so long as you are in it, no harm shall come to you?"

At this point matters were complicated by the arrival of a new personage upon the scene.

Thinking probably that the soldiers were after him, Joseph Picaut appeared in the doorway.

The house of his sister, who was well known as a Blue, doubtless seemed to him a safe place to hide in. But he fell back in amazement as his eye fell upon her guests.

"Ah, you have gentlefolks here!" he said. "I'm not surprised any more at the arrival of the soldiers; you have betrayed your guests."

"Miserable wretch!" shrieked Marianne, seizing her husband's sabre from the chimney-piece, and rushing at Joseph, who aimed a blow at her.

Bonneville leaped down from the ladder; but the young peasant had already thrown herself between the brother and sister, covering the widow with her body.

"Put down your weapon!" she cried to the Vendean

in manly, imperious tones, which seemed as if they could not have issued from so frail and delicate a frame, — “put down your weapon; in the king’s name, I command you!”

“Who are you to talk thus to me?” demanded Joseph, always ready to rebel against authority in every form.

“I am she whose coming is expected; I am she whose word is law!”

At these words, uttered with the utmost majesty of expression, Joseph, confused and stupefied, let his gun fall.

“Now,” continued the peasant, “do you go up there with Monsieur.”

“And you?” Bonneville asked.

“I shall remain here.”

“But — ”

“There’s no time for discussion. Go, go, I say!”

The two men mounted the ladder, and the trap-door closed behind them.

“What are you doing, pray?” the peasant demanded of the widow Picaut, looking on in surprise as she moved the bed upon which her dead husband was lying, and pulled it out into the middle of the room.

“I am preparing a hiding-place for you where no one will dream of looking.”

“But I don’t want to hide. In this costume, they won’t know me. I prefer to face them.”

“But I don’t propose that you shall do anything of the kind,” said the widow, so resolutely that the other’s will was subdued. “You heard what that man said; if you are discovered in my house, it will be said, or thought, that I sold you, and I don’t propose to run the risk of having you discovered.”

"You, my enemy?"

"Yes, your enemy,—but an enemy who would lay herself down to die on that bed by the side of him who is there already, if she should see you a prisoner."

There was nothing to reply to that.

Pascal's widow raised the mattress on which the body was lying, and first of all hid beneath it the clothes, shirt, and shoes, which had piqued Courtin's curiosity; then she made a place between the mattresses for the peasant, who crawled into it without objection, leaving an opening on the wall-side for breathing purposes.

Then the bed was put back in its place.

Mistress Picaut had no more than finished an inspection of every corner of the room, to make sure that nothing which could compromise her guests had been left in sight, than she heard the clash of arms, and the figure of an officer passed the window.

"Is this the place?" said the officer to one of those behind him.

"What do you want?" demanded the widow, opening the door.

"You have strangers here; we would like to see them," replied the officer.

"Well, upon my word! don't you recognize me?" interposed Marianne, evading a direct reply to the question put to her.

"*Pardieu!* yes, I do recognize you; you are the woman who guided us last night."

"Very well! if I guided you when you were in search of the enemies of the Government, it's hardly likely that I should be hiding any such in my own house."

"*Dame!* that's good logic, captain," said the other officer.

"Bah! do you think you can trust these people? They are all brigands from their mother's breast," rejoined the captain. "Did n't you see the little ten-year-old rascal, who ran down the hill at the top of his speed, heedless of our threats? He was their sentinel, and gave them warning. Luckily, they had n't time to escape, and must be hidden somewhere."

"Indeed, it's possible."

"It's certain, you mean."

"No harm will be done you," he continued, turning to the widow, "but we must search your house."

"As you please," she replied with perfect *sang-froid*.

Seating herself in the chimney-corner, she took the distaff and spindle she had left on the chair, and began to spin.

The officer made a sign with his hand to five or six soldiers who entered the house; after he had looked all around the room, he went straight to the bed.

The widow became whiter than the linen she was at work upon; her eyes shot fire, and the spindle dropped from her hands.

The officer looked under the bed, and in the space between it and the wall; then he put out his hand as if to remove the sheet which covered the dead body.

The widow could endure no longer.

She jumped to her feet, and darted to the corner where her husband's gun was standing against the wall; she resolutely picked it up, and said to the officer, threateningly,—

"If you put your hand on that body, as true as I am an honest woman, I will kill you like a dog!"

The second officer took his comrade by the arm.

Mistress Picaut, gun in hand, approached the bed, and for the second time raised the linen covering.

"Now look!" said she. "This man, who was my husband, was killed yesterday in your service."

"Ah, our first guide,—he of the Pont-Farcy ford!" exclaimed the officer.

"Poor woman!" said his companion. "Let us leave her in peace; it's a shame to torment her, in the state she's in."

"But the statement of that man we met was definite and categorical," the superior officer objected.

"We were wrong not to make him come with us."

"Have you any other rooms than this?"

"There's the attic above, and the stable outside."

"Search the attic and stable; but first open the chests and look in the oven."

The soldiers scattered to execute these orders.

From the horrible place of shelter in which she was squeezed, the young peasant lost no detail of the conversation; she heard the steps of the soldiers mounting the ladder, and trembled more at that sound than she had done when they approached the bed of death in which she was hidden, for she thought with terror that the hiding-place of Bonneville and the Vendean was much less secure than her own.

So when she heard the men who had been sent to explore the attic descending the ladder, when there had been no sound, no disturbance, no struggle to indicate that the men had been discovered, her heart was relieved of an enormous weight.

The officer commanding the squad was waiting in the lower room, leaning against the kneading-trough. His subordinate was directing the investigations of eight or ten soldiers in the stable.

"Well, have you found nothing?" the officer asked.

"No," replied a corporal.

"Did you shake up the straw and hay, and whatever else there is?"

"We ran our bayonets in everywhere; if there was a man there, he must necessarily have been stabbed."

"Very well, let's visit the other house; they must be somewhere here."

The men left the room, followed by the officer. While they continued their explorations, he leaned against the outer wall, looking at a little shed which he proposed to have searched in due time.

Just then a bit of plaster, hardly half as big as his little finger, fell at his feet.

He quickly raised his head, and thought he saw a hand disappear between two of the roof timbers.

"This way, men!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

All the soldiers came running up.

"Pretty fellows you are! You did your duty extremely well!" said he.

"What's going on, captain?" they asked.

"Why, there are men up there in the attic you pretend to have visited. Now, then, don't leave a wisp of straw without turning it over. Up you go!"

The soldiers re-entered the widow's house, went straight up the ladder to the trap and tried to raise it; but this time it resisted: it was secured on the upper side.

"Ah, very good!" cried the officer, putting his foot on the first round of the ladder. "Come, you," he continued raising his voice, "come out of your hole, or we'll come and pull you out."

Thereupon an animated discussion was heard in the garret; it was evident that the besieged were not in accord upon the course to be pursued.

This is what had happened.

Bonneville and his companion, instead of secreting themselves where the hay was most plentiful, and where the soldiers' attention would naturally be first drawn, crawled under a pile not more than a foot or two deep right beside the trap.

It happened as they hoped; the soldiers almost walked over them, ran their bayonets into the largest piles, moved the bales of straw about where they were heaped up in the greatest number; but they neglected those spots which, compared with the rest of the attic, seemed to be too shallow to hide a man's body.

We have seen that they withdrew without finding what they sought.

From their hiding-place, with their ears glued to the floor, which was very thin, Bonneville and the Vendean heard with perfect distinctness all that was said on the lower floor.

When he heard the officer give the order to inspect his domicile, Joseph Picaut became decidedly uneasy; he had a stock of powder stowed away there, the possession of which was very embarrassing just then.

Disregarding his companion's remonstrances, he left his hiding-place and began to watch the movements of the troops through the chinks between the timbers of the roof and those of the wall. In this way he loosened the bit of masonry which fell upon the officer and attracted his attention; so that he saw Joseph pull away the hand upon which he had been leaning to look into the yard.

When he heard the officer's loud exclamation, and realized that he and his companion were discovered, Bonneville jumped upon the trap-door, and fastened it, bitterly reproaching the Vendean for his imprudence, which had ruined them.

That was the talk which was heard in the widow's room.

But reproaches were useless so long as they were discovered; they must make up their minds what to do.

"You saw them, did n't you?" demanded Bonneville.

"Yes."

"How many are there?"

"About thirty, I should say."

"In that case resistance would be madness; besides, they have n't discovered Madame, and our arrest, by taking them away from here, will complete the work of saving her, which your brave sister-in-law has so well begun."

"So that your opinion is —?" demanded Picaut.

"To give ourselves up."

"Give ourselves up?" cried the Vendean. "Never!"

"What do you say? Never?"

"Yes, I understand what you're thinking! You are noble and rich; they will put you in a comfortable prison, where you'll have everything you want; but me, you see, — they'll send me back to the galleys, where I have already spent fourteen years! No, no, I much prefer a bed underground to the bed of a convict, — the ditch to the dungeon."

"If a fight would compromise none but us," replied Bonneville, "I swear that I would share your lot, and that they should not take me alive, any more than you; but there's the mother of our king to be saved, and it's not the time to consult our own fancies or our own interests."

"Let us kill as many of them as we can, I say! That would make so many enemies less for Henri V. I will never give myself up, I tell you again," continued the Vendean, placing his foot on the trap-door, which Bonneville had made a motion to open.

"Oho!" said the comte, frowning, "you are going to obey me, and without argument, I rather think!"

Picaut burst out laughing; but in the midst of his fiendish gayety, a blow from Bonneville's fist sent him reeling to the end of the attic.

He fell, and let his gun drop; but as he fell he noticed that he was opposite a window covered with a wooden shutter. Thereupon it flashed into his brain that he might let the young man give himself up,* and take advantage of the diversion to make his own escape.

So he pretended to submit to Bonneville's dictation; but while the latter was unfastening the trap-door, he burst open the shutter with a blow of his hand, and picked up his gun; and just as the comte, having opened the trap, had his feet on the upper rounds of the ladder, crying, "Don't fire! we surrender!" the Vendean leaned over him, fired through the opening at the group of soldiers, turned away, took a flying leap through the window into the garden, and made his escape into the forest, having successfully run the gauntlet of the guns of two or three sentinels.

A soldier fell, severely wounded by the shot from the attic; instantly ten guns were turned upon Bonneville, and before the mistress of the house, rushing forward to make a rampart of her body, could reach him, the unfortunate youth rolled down the ladder, with ten bullets in his body, and fell at the widow's feet, crying,—

"Vive Henri V!"

To this dying cry of Bonneville a shriek of pain and despair made answer.

The confusion which followed the volley prevented the soldiers noticing that this shriek came from the bed where Pascal Picaut lay, and that it seemed to have issued from the lips of the body, which alone was calm and impassive in the midst of that awful scene.

The soldiers rushed up into the attic, to seize the murderer, unaware that he had escaped by way of the window.

Through the thick smoke the officer espied the widow kneeling and pressing Bonneville's head against her breast.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Marianne, in a voice choked with emotion.

"But you're wounded yourself!"

In truth, great drops of blood were falling fast from her face upon the comte's breast.

"I?" she asked.

"Yes; your head is bleeding."

"What matters my blood," retorted the widow, "when there is not a drop left in his body, for whom I failed to give my own life, as I swore to do!"

At this moment a soldier appeared at the trap-door.

"Captain," said he, "the other got away through the window; they fired at him but missed him."

"It's the other that we must have!" cried the officer, naturally assuming that the other must have been Petit-Pierre; "unless he finds another guide, we shall soon have him. Come, be off after him!—But first, my good woman, just move away, will you?" said he, after reflection. "Here you, search the dead man."

The order was executed, but nothing was found in Bonneville's pockets, for the reason that he had on Pascal Picaut's clothes which the widow had given him to wear while his own were drying.

"And now can I have him?" said Marianne, when the search was over. She pointed, as she spoke, to the young man's body.

"Yes, do what you please with it; but thank God at the same time that you were useful to us last evening; for except for that I should have sent you to Nantes, where you would have learned what it costs to harbor rebels."

With this parting shot the captain got his little band together and set out in the direction the fugitive was seen to take.

As soon as they were out of sight, the widow ran to the bed, and raising the mattress, lifted out the princesse, who had fainted away.

Ten minutes later Bonneville's body had been placed beside that of Pascal Picaut, and the two women, the pretended Regent and the lowly peasant, were kneeling side by side at the foot of the bed, praying for these first victims of the uprising of 1832.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN WHICH JEAN OULLIER SAYS WHAT HE THINKS
OF YOUNG BARON MICHEL.

WHILE the melancholy events we have described were taking place in the house where Jean Oullier had left poor Bonneville and his companion, everything was bustle, confusion, and gladness in the château of the Marquis de Souday.

The old gentleman could not contain himself for joy. The moment so long awaited had at last arrived. He had selected for his fighting costume the least worn of the hunting-coats he had succeeded in finding in his wardrobe; and, girded like a general of division, with a white sash (which his daughters had embroidered long before, in anticipation of an appeal of arms), the bleeding heart upon his chest, the chaplet at his buttonhole, — arrayed, that is to say, in the grand style of the old days, — he went about trying the edge of his sword on every piece of furniture that came under his eye.

Besides that, every now and then he rubbed the rust off his voice of command, by teaching Michel the manual, and performing the same service for the notary, whom he insisted upon reckoning among his recruits, although that functionary, exaggerated as his legitimist opinions were, did not deem it his duty to manifest them in an extra legal manner.

Bertha, following her father's example, had assumed the costume she was to wear during the expedition. It

consisted of a tight-fitting jacket of green velvet; open at the chest so as to show a frilled waist of dazzling whiteness; it was trimmed with lace and black silk. The costume was completed by flowing trousers of gray cloth, which fell over hussar boots reaching to the knee.

She wore no sash around her waist, for that, among the Vendéans, designated the commanding officer; but it was attached to her left arm with a red ribbon.

This garb set off Bertha's supple and graceful form to great advantage; and her gray felt hat with a white feather suited marvellously the masculine cast of her features. Thus arrayed, Bertha was charming.

It should be said that, although by reason of her manly ways, Bertha was far from being a coquette, she could but notice with satisfaction in her then state of mind, or of heart, the additional value which that equipment gave to her physical charms; and having observed, as she thought, that a profound impression had been produced upon Michel, she became as expansively joyous as her father.

The fact is, that Michel, whose brain was also in a state of exaltation, was unable to gaze upon the noble, knightly bearing of Bertha in her new garb, without feeling a degree of admiration which he took no pains to conceal; but this admiration, let us hasten to say, was largely due to the thought of the graceful loveliness of his beloved Mary, when she should have donned a similar costume, — for he had no manner of doubt that the two sisters were to make the campaign together, in similar attire.

So his eyes gently questioned Mary, as if to learn if she were not going to beautify herself in like manner. But Mary, ever since the morning, had seemed so cold and reserved toward him; since the scene in the tower she

had so carefully avoided speaking to him, that the young man's natural bashfulness was largely reinforced, and he no longer dared to venture upon anything more than the supplicating, questioning look we have mentioned.

It was Bertha, therefore, not Michel, who at last suggested to Mary to hurry and put on her knightly toggery. Mary said nothing; since the morning, her sadness and her melancholy expression had cast a shadow upon the general light-heartedness. She obeyed Bertha, however, and went up to her room.

The garments she was to assume were laid out upon a chair; she looked at them with a faint smile, but did not move a finger to lift them up. She sat down upon her little maple-wood bed, and great tears rolled down her cheeks.

Mary, pious and innocent, was perfectly sincere and straightforward in the impulse which had led her to adopt the course of abnegation and self-sacrifice suggested to her by her sisterly affection; but she presumed too much, perhaps, upon her strength.

At the very outset of the struggle she was about to enter into against herself, she felt no weakening of her resolution,—for that was always the same,—but a lessened confidence in the result of her efforts.

Since morning she had been saying to herself, over and over again, "You must not, you cannot love him;" and all the time the voice of her heart had replied, "You do love him."

At every step she took under the empire of these feelings, Mary left farther behind all that had hitherto been her hope and her delight. The animation and bustle, and the virile avocations which had been her never-failing resource throughout her childhood and youth, became insupportable to her. Even political

excitement lost its power before the one absorbing subject of her thoughts. Everything which could possibly distract her heart from the thoughts which she longed to banish evaded her grasp and flew away, as a group of song-birds scatters when a hawk swoops down on them.

Every moment she realized more fully how entirely apart and alone she would be in her approaching conflict with herself,—without other support than that of her own will, without other consolation than such as she could derive from her devotion; and she wept as much from grief as from dread, as much from regret as from apprehension.

By her present suffering she gauged the suffering that was to come.

For a half-hour she had been sitting thus,—sad, pensive, wrapped in gloomy forebodings, drifting about helplessly in the chaos of her own grief,—when she heard at the door of her room, which she had left ajar, the voice of Jean Oullier, saying to her in the tone which he kept in reserve for the two girls, whose second father he had constituted himself, as we have seen,—

“What’s the trouble, dear Mademoiselle Mary?”

Mary started, as if awaking from a dream; and in much confusion she replied, with a faint attempt at a smile,—

“Nothing’s the trouble, my poor Jean; upon my honor.”

Meanwhile Jean Oullier had looked at her more carefully. He walked a few steps toward her, and said, in a tone of very mild and respectful reproof, shaking his head the while,—

“Why say so, little Mary? Do you doubt my friendship?”

"I?—doubt your friendship?" cried Mary.

"*Dame!* you must doubt it; for you think you can deceive it."

Mary put out her hand. Jean took it—soft and slender—in his coarse paws, and looking sadly at the maiden.

"Ah, dear little Mary!" he said, as if she were about ten years old, "there's no rain without clouds, no tears without sorrow. Do you remember the day—you were a mere child—when you wept because Bertha threw your shells into the well? The next day—Jean Oullier had travelled fifteen leagues over-night, but your playthings of the sea were replaced, and your beautiful blue eyes were dry and smiling."

"Yes, my good Jean Oullier; yes, I do remember it," said Mary, who, never more than at that moment, needed to unburden her heart.

"Well," rejoined Jean, "I have grown old; but my affection for you has steadily increased. Tell me your thoughts, then, Mary; and if there's a remedy I will find it. And if there is none, my old shrivelled eyes will weep with yours."

Mary realized how hard it would be to deceive the clear-sighted solicitude of the old retainer. She faltered and blushed; but without making up her mind to divulge the real cause of her tears, she tried to account for them.

"I was weeping, my poor Jean," she said, "because I was thinking that this war may cost me the lives of all I love."

Alas! Since the previous evening Mary had learned to lie.

But Jean Oullier did not allow himself to be deceived by that reply. Shaking his head gently, he said,—

"No, little Mary; that's not the cause of your tears. When old gray heads like M. le Marquis and myself allow ourselves to be deluded, and see only victory in store for us, a young heart like yours would not be the first to anticipate defeat."

Mary would not lower her colors.

"Nevertheless, Jean," said she, "I assure you it's as I say;" and she assumed one of the wheedling attitudes, whose power over the goodman she had learned by long experience.

"No, no; it's not that, I tell you!" repeated Jean, with the utmost gravity and signs of increasing anxiety.

"Pray, what is it, then?" Mary asked.

"Good!" said the old keeper; "you choose to have me enlighten you as to the cause of your tears, do you?"

"Yes, if you can."

"Very well, then. It's a hard thing to say, but I verily believe that that miserable little M. Michel is the cause of your tears."

Mary became as white as the white bed-curtains which made a frame for her face; all her blood flowed back to her heart.

"What do you mean, Jean?" she stammered.

"I mean this: that you, as well as I, have seen what is going on, and that you are no more content with it than I am. Only, as I am a man, I rage and storm about it; while you, being a girl, can only weep."

Mary could not suppress a sob as she felt Jean Oullier's finger pressing upon the wound.

"It's not astonishing, however," continued the old man, as if to himself. "Although this wretched *canaille* call you 'She-wolf,' you are nought but a woman, — and a woman made with the best leaven that ever fell into God Almighty's kneading-trough."

"Really, I don't understand you, Jean; upon my word, I don't!"

"Oh, yes; you do understand me very well, little Mary! Yes, you have seen, as I have, what is happening. Indeed, who would not see it, *mon Dieu*! One must be blind not to see it, for she scarcely pretends to conceal it."

"In Heaven's name, what are you talking about, Jean? Tell me. Don't you see that you're killing me by keeping me in suspense?"

"What can I be talking about, pray, except Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"My sister?"

"Yes, your sister, who puts herself on exhibition with that booby; who proposes to drag him into our camp in her wake; who seems, meanwhile, to have tied him to her petticoat, for fear that he may run away; and exhibits him as her conquest to everybody, heedless of the comments which may be made by the servants and M. le Marquis's friends,—to say nothing of that wretched notary, who is on hand, taking it all in with his little eyes, and looking as if he were already getting his pens ready to draw up the marriage contract."

"But suppose you're right," said Mary, whose pallor had given place to a deep flush, and whose heart was beating as if it would break. "Suppose you're right; what harm is there in it?"

"What! What harm? Why, my blood fairly boiled just now when I saw Mademoiselle de Souday — But, no, no; don't talk to me about it!"

"I say, yes, yes; let's talk about it!" Mary insisted. "What was Bertha doing just now, good Jean?" she added, hanging upon the old keeper's words.

"Well, Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday was tying

the white sash on M. Michel's arm. The colors which Charette wore on the arm of the son of the man who — Ah, little Mary, don't! You make me say more things than I want to say! It's a good thing for Mademoiselle Bertha that your father is put out with me at this moment!"

"My father! Do you mean to say that you spoke to him —"

Mary left the question unfinished, but Jean supplied the words left unsaid.

"To be sure, I spoke to him," said he.

"When?"

"This morning, — in the first place, when I handed him Petit-Pierre's letter; and again, when I gave him the list of the men of his division who will march with us. I know it was n't so long a list as might have been expected; but, after all, he who does what he can, does what he ought. Do you know what reply he made when I asked him if the young gentleman was really one of us? Do you know?"

"No," said Mary.

"*'Mort Dieu!'* he replied, 'you recruit so badly that I am compelled to give you some assistants! Yes, M. Michel is one of us; and if you don't like it, blame Mademoiselle Bertha for it —'"

"Did he say that, my poor Jean?"

"Yes. So I propose to speak to Mademoiselle Bertha."

"Jean, my friend, take care!"

"Take care of what?"

"That you don't wound Bertha! — that you don't make her suffer! She loves him, you see," said Mary, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Ah, you confess that she loves him!" exclaimed Jean Oullier.

"I am forced to," said Mary.

"To think of her loving a little doll whom a breath would overturn!" pursued Jean. "To think that Made-moiselle Bertha could dream of exchanging one of the most illustrious and oldest names in the province—one of the names which are the glory of us peasants, as well as of those who bear them—for the name of a traitor and a coward!"

Mary felt as if her heart were bursting.

"Jean, my friend," said she, "you go too far! Don't say that, Jean; I implore you!"

"Oh, yes, it's very fine; but it shall not be," continued Jean, stalking up and down the room without heeding what the young girl said. "No; it shall not be! If everybody else is indifferent to your honor, I will guard it; and if necessary, rather than see the glory of the family I serve thus tarnished, why, I will—"

And Jean Oullier made a threatening gesture, which it was impossible to misunderstand.

"No, Jean, no; you won't do that!" cried Mary, in heart-rending tones. "I implore you with clasped hands."

She fell at his feet, and the Vendean recoiled in terror.

"And you, too, little Mary," he exclaimed; "you, too, I—"

But she did not give him time to finish.

"Just think, Jean," said she; "oh, think of the bitter pain you will cause my poor Bertha!"

Jean Oullier was gazing at her in amazement, by no means cured of the suspicions he had conceived, when

he heard Bertha's voice commanding Michel to wait for her in the garden, and not to go away.

The next moment she opened the door.

"Well," said she to her sister, "are n't you ready yet?"

"But what's the matter?" she continued, looking at Mary more closely. "One would say that you were weeping. And you, too, Jean Oullier; your face is by no means cheerful. What, in the name of Heaven, is going on here?"

"I will tell you what is going on, Mademoiselle Bertha," replied the Vendean.

"No, no," cried Mary. "Don't, Jean, I implore you! Be quiet! be quiet!"

"Oh, but you frighten me, do you know, with all this mystery! And Jean's inquisitorial way of looking at me has all the appearance of covering a charge of some great crime. Come, come; speak, my Jean. I feel disposed to be very indulgent and kind to-day. I am so happy to see my fondest dream realized, and to share with you the noblest of men's privileges, — war!"

"Be frank, Mademoiselle Bertha," said the Vendean. "Is it really that which makes you so happy?"

"Ah, I see where the trouble is!" replied the girl, frankly meeting the question. "M. le Major-General Oullier is pleased to scold me for encroaching upon his functions.

"I'll wager, Mary," said she, "that this is all about my poor Michel."

"Precisely, mademoiselle," interposed Jean Oullier, without giving Mary time to reply.

"Well, what have you to say, Jean? My father is very glad to have one more volunteer; and I don't see

that any sin has been committed which calls for such frowns as you 're indulging in now!"

"It's very possible that that may be Monsieur your father's way of looking at it," retorted the old keeper; "but we have a different idea."

"May I venture to inquire what it is?"

"It is that every one had best stay in his own camp."

"Well?"

"Well —"

"What then? Go on!"

"Why, M. Michel is out of place in our camp."

"Why so? Is not M. Michel a royalist? I should say that he had given sufficient proofs of his devotion in the last two days."

"That may be; but what does that matter? We peasants, Mistress Bertha, have a way of saying, 'Like father, like son;' and, therefore, we cannot put much faith in M. Michel's royalist ardor."

"All right, he will compel you to believe in it!"

"It may be so; but meanwhile —"

The Vendean checked himself, and frowned darkly.

"Meanwhile what?" said Bertha.

"Well, I'll tell you. It will be very hard for old soldiers like me to march elbow to elbow with a man whom we don't esteem."

"Just tell me what you have against him," demanded Bertha, in a tone which began to be slightly acrimonious.

"Everything."

"Everything means nothing, when you don't specify."

"Well, his father, his birth —"

"His father! his birth! — always the same old rot. Just mark this, Master Jean Oullier," said Bertha, frowning in her turn, "that it is because of his father

and his birth — for those identical reasons — that I have become interested in this young man.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean what I say. My heart took fire at the unjust reproaches which have been heaped upon the poor fellow by all our neighbors, as well as in this house. I am tired and sick to death of hearing him blamed for a birth which he did n’t choose, a father whom he never knew, sins which he did not commit, and which his father may not have committed. All that makes me indignant, Jean; it disgusts me. In short, it makes me think that it would be a truly noble and generous and praiseworthy act to give him some encouragement, — to assist him to make reparation for the past, if reparation is due, and to show himself so valiant and devoted that slander never again will dare attack his name.”

“I tell you once for all,” retorted Oullier, “that he ’ll have a hard task to make me respect his wretched name.”

“Nevertheless, you will find that you will have to respect it, Master Jean,” said Bertha, firmly, “when it has become mine, as I hope it will.”

“Oh, I can’t believe yet that you dream of such a thing, although I hear you say it!” cried Jean.

“Ask Mary,” said Bertha, turning to her sister, who was listening, pale and breathless, to this discussion, as if her life were at stake; “ask my sister, to whom I have laid bare my heart, and who is able to judge of my suffering and my hope. Look you, Jean, anything like deceit or constraint is repugnant to me; and with you, especially, I am very happy to have thrown aside all concealment, and to speak with absolute frankness, and so I tell you honestly, as I am in the habit of telling you all my thoughts, Jean Oullier, I love him!”

"No, no; don't say so, I implore you, Mademoiselle Bertha! I am only a poor peasant; but in the old days, when you were a little thing, to be sure, you gave me the right to call you my child, and I have always loved you and still love you both as no father ever loved his own daughters. And the old fellow who watched over your childhood, who held you on his knees when you were a little girl, and rocked you to sleep, — the old man whose only joy on earth you are, throws himself at your feet to say, 'Don't give your heart to that man, Mademoiselle Bertha!'"

"Why not?" she asked, testily.

"Because, — and I say it from the bottom of my heart, upon my soul and my conscience, — because an alliance between you and him would be a wicked, monstrous, impossible thing!"

"Your attachment to us makes you exaggerate everything, my poor Jean. M. Michel loves me, I believe; I am very sure that I love him. And if he goes manfully through with his self-imposed task of rehabilitating himself, I shall be very glad to become his wife."

"In that case," said Jean Oullier, in a tone of utter discouragement, "it will be necessary for me in my old age to seek other masters and another home."

"Why so?"

"Because Jean Oullier, poor and homeless as he is, or may be, will never descend so low as to abide under the same roof with the son of a renegade and a traitor."

"Be silent, Jean Oullier!" cried Bertha; "hold your peace, or I may say something to wound you!"

"Jean, good Jean!" murmured Mary.

"No, no," said the old keeper; "it is best that you should know all the worthy deeds which add lustre to

the name you are in such a hurry to take instead of your own."

"Not a word more, Jean Oullier," interposed Bertha, almost threateningly. "Look you, at this moment I may say to you that I have often questioned my heart to know whether it cared more for my father or for you; but one insult more, one insult more to Michel, and you will be nothing more to me —"

"Than a valet?" interrupted Jean. "Very good; but a valet who remains honest and true, and who has done his duty as a valet all his life without ever failing in it, has the right to cry, 'Shame to the son of the man who sold Charette, as Judas sold Christ, for a sum of money!'"

"Pshaw! What matters it to me what happened thirty-six years ago, — eighteen years before I was born? I know the living man, not the dead one, — the son, not the father. I love him, Jean, do you hear? — as you yourself taught me to love and to hate. Suppose his father did do that, which I don't choose to believe, why, we will make the name of Michel — the name of the accursed traitor — so glorious that every one will bow as he passes the one who bears it. And you will help me yourself; yes, you will help me, Jean. For I tell you again, I love him; and nothing, nothing but death, can dry up the spring of affection which is bubbling up in my heart."

Mary could not restrain a slight moan; but weak as it was, Jean Oullier heard it, and turned to look at her.

Then, as if at his wit's end between the lament of one and the resolute eloquence of the other, he threw himself back in his chair and hid his face in his hands. The old man was weeping, and sought to hide his tears.

Bertha understood the conflict that was raging in that true heart.

She went to him and knelt in front of him.

"Surely," said she, "you can estimate the force of my affection for this young man, can't you? — since it almost made me forget my true and deep attachment for you."

Jean shook his head sadly.

"I can understand your dislike of him and your repugnance to such an arrangement," she continued; "and I was prepared to hear you give expression to them. But have patience, my old friend, — patience and resignation! God only can take from my heart what he put in it; and he will not be so cruel as to do it, for it would kill me. Give us time to satisfy you that your prejudice makes you unjust, and that the man of my choice is abundantly worthy of me."

At this moment the marquis's voice was heard calling Jean Oullier, in tones which implied that something new and important had happened.

Jean rose and moved toward the door.

"Well," asked Bertha, stopping him, "are you going without another word?"

"M. le Marquis is calling me, mademoiselle," said the Vendean, coldly.

"*Mademoiselle!*" cried Bertha; "*Mademoiselle!* Ah, my prayers do not soften you, then? Very well; but remember this, — that I forbid you, do you hear? — to put any slight upon M. Michel; that I desire that his life should be sacred in your eyes; and that if any thing happens to him by your connivance, I will avenge him, not upon you, but upon myself! You know, Jean Oullier, that I am in the habit of doing what I say."

Jean Oullier looked at Bertha fixedly, and grasped her arm.

"Perhaps even that would be preferable to your becoming that man's wife," said he.

As the marquis was repeating his summons impatiently, Jean rushed from the room, leaving Bertha bewildered by his obstinacy and Mary bowed down by the terror which the violence of Bertha's passion inspired in her.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN WHICH BARON MICHEL BECOMES BERTHA'S
AIDE-DE-CAMP.

JEAN OULLIER hurried down to the courtyard, more eager, possibly, to get away from the young woman, than to obey the summons of the marquis.

He found the latter in the courtyard, and by his side stood a peasant covered with sweat and mud. He brought word that the soldiers had invaded Pascal Picaut's house; he had seen them go in, but knew nothing further than that. He had been stationed in the furze bushes along the road to La Sablonnière with instructions to hasten to the château if the soldiers went in the direction of the house where the two fugitives were, and he had fulfilled those instructions to the letter.

The marquis, who knew from Oullier that Petit-Pierre and the Comte de Bonneville were at Pascal's house, was in a highly excited frame of mind.

"Jean Oullier! Jean Oullier!" he was shouting in much the same tone in which Augustus must have addressed Varus, when he asked him the famous question about his legions.

"Jean Oullier, why did you trust anybody but yourself? If any harm has come to them, my poor house will have been dishonored even before its ruin is accomplished!"

Jean Oullier made no reply; he hung his head, and remained mute and gloomy.

His impassive silence irritated the marquis.

"Come, Jean Oullier, my horse!" he cried, "and if the person whom I called 'my young friend' yesterday, without knowing who he was, is a prisoner in the hands of the Blues, let us prove, by giving our lives in an attempt to rescue him, that we were not unworthy of his confidence."

But Jean Oullier shook his head.

"What!" shouted the marquis, "won't you bring my horse?"

"He is right," said Bertha, who had come up in time to hear the order given by the marquis, and to hear, or see, Jean Oullier's refusal to obey; "we must be careful to risk nothing by reckless haste."

"Did you see the soldiers leave the Picaut house with any prisoners?" she asked the messenger.

"No; I saw them murder *gars* Malherbe, whom Jean Oullier left to watch on the edge of the high land. I followed them until I saw them in Picaut's orchard, and then I came to notify you as Master Jean ordered me to do."

"Now, Jean Oullier," continued Bertha, "do you think you can answer for the woman to whom you intrusted them?"

Jean turned upon his questioner, and looked at her reproachfully.

"Yesterday," said he, "I would have said of Marianne Picaut: 'I will answer for her as for myself;' but —"

"But what?" queried Bertha.

"But to-day," retorted the old keeper, with a sigh, "I am suspicious of everybody."

"Come, come, this is all time thrown away. My horse! Bring my horse, and in ten minutes I shall know what course to take."

Bertha put her hand upon her father's arm.

"Death!" he exclaimed, "is this the way I am to be obeyed in my own house? What can I expect from others if my own people begin by not doing as I order?"

"Your commands are sacred, father," said Bertha, "especially for your daughters; but your devotion is running away with your good sense. Let us not forget that they, whom we are so anxious about, are, in other people's eyes, simple peasants. Now if the Marquis de Souday goes rushing about on horseback in person, inquiring about two peasants, he at once betrays their importance in his eyes, and draws the attention of our enemies upon them."

"Mademoiselle Bertha is right," said Oullier, "and I will go there myself."

"It's no better for you to go than for my father."

"Why so?"

"Because you would run too great a risk."

"I was there this morning, however, and I ran that great risk just to see what sort of shot my poor Pataud was killed with; I think I might well do as much to learn the fate of M. de Bonneville and Petit-Pierre."

"But I tell you, Jean," rejoined Bertha, "that after all that happened last night, you must not show yourself where there are soldiers; we need, for such a duty, some one who is in no way compromised, who can go to the very heart of the place without exciting suspicion, find out what is going on, and, if possible, what is likely to happen."

"What a pity that that animal Lorient was so determined to return to Machecoul!" said the marquis. "I begged him hard enough to stay, however; I think I must have had a presentiment of something of this sort, I was so anxious to attach him to my division."

"Well, but you have M. Michel left, have n't you?" said Jean Oullier, ironically. "You can send him to the Picaut house, or wherever else you wish. If there were ten thousand men around the house, they would let him go in with never a suspicion that he was there in your interest."

"Yes, and that's just what we must do," said Bertha, accepting Jean's adhesion to the secret object of her suggestion, no matter what his intentions might be; "is n't it, father?"

"By the Lord, I believe it is!" cried the marquis. "For all his somewhat effeminate appearance, this young man will be decidedly useful to us."

At the first mention of his name Michel had drawn near, respectfully awaiting the commands of the marquis; and when he saw that he was inclined to accept Bertha's proposal, his face beamed with joy.

Bertha was radiant also.

"Are you ready to do what Petit-Pierre's welfare demands?" she asked the baron.

"I am ready to do whatever you please, mademoiselle, to prove to M. le Marquis how grateful I am for the gracious welcome he has given me."

"Good! Take a horse, then,—not mine, for it would be recognized,—and gallop there as fast as you can. Go into the house without weapons, as if curiosity were your only motive, and if our friends are in danger—"

The marquis stopped to think; he was neither quick nor clever at planning.

"If our friends are in danger," Bertha went on for him, "light a bon-fire on the hill-top. Meanwhile, Jean Oullier will have got his men together; and then, in a body, and well armed, we will fly to the assistance of those who are so dear to us."

"Bravo!" cried the marquis; "I always said, you know, that Bertha had the brains of the family."

Bertha smiled proudly as she glanced at Michel.

"Pray, are n't you going to begin to think about dressing yourself?" she said to her sister, who had come down, and noiselessly approached, as Michel hurried away to take horse.

"No," replied Mary.

"What! no?"

"I mean to remain as I am."

"Really?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mary, smiling sadly; "in every army, by the side of the men, fighting and dying, there is need of sisters of charity to look after them and comfort them; I will be your sister of charity."

Bertha gazed wonderingly at her.

It may be that she was about to ask her some question concerning the change which had taken place in her mind, when Michel reappeared, already mounted, and stayed the words upon her lips.

"You have told me what I must do, mademoiselle," he said to her who had given him his orders, "in the event that any misfortune has happened in Pascal Picaut's house; but you didn't tell me what to do if Petit-Pierre is safe and sound."

"In that case," said the marquis, "come back, and set our minds at rest."

"No," Bertha interposed, determined to make the part her beloved was to play as important as possible; "so much going and coming would excite the suspicions of the troops who are probably prowling about in the forest. You will remain at Picaut's or in the neighborhood, and meet us at nightfall at the Jailhay oak. Do you know it?"

"I should think so!" cried Michel; "it's on the road to Souday."

Michel knew every oak on that road.

"Good!" said the maiden; "we will be in hiding near by. You will give the signal,—the cry of the screech-owl thrice, and of the brown owl once,—and we will join you. Now go, dear Monsieur Michel!"

Michel saluted the marquis and the two girls, and bowing to his horse's neck, galloped off.

He was an excellent horseman, by the way; and Bertha noticed that he very skilfully made his horse change feet, as he turned short at the *porte-cochère*.

"It's incredible how easy it is to make a proper fellow out of a rustic!" said the marquis, entering the château. "To be sure, women have to have a hand in it. This young fellow is really not so bad."

"Oh, yes," retorted Jean Oullier, "it's easy enough to make as many proper fellows, as you call them, as you choose; it's men of spirit and heart that are not so easily manufactured."

"Jean Oullier," said Bertha, "you have already forgotten what I said; beware!"

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle," replied Oullier; "it's just because I forget nothing that you see me suffering so at present. I did look upon my aversion for this youth as remorse; but now I begin to fear that it's a presentiment."

"Remorse, Jean Oullier?"

"Ah, did you hear?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't take it back!"

"What have you to reproach yourself with, as against him?"

"Nothing against him," said Jean Oullier, in a melancholy voice; "but against his father."

"Against his father?" Bertha repeated, shuddering in spite of herself.

"Yes," said Jean; "there was a day when, on his account, I changed my name; that day my name was not Jean Oullier."

"What was it, pray?"

"Retribution."

"For his father?" said Bertha.

Suddenly there recurred to her mind all the stories current in the province concerning the death of Baron Michel.

"For his father who was found dead on a hunting-party? Ah, what have you said, wretched man!"

"That the son may very well avenge the father by returning sorrow for sorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"You love him madly."

"What then?"

"Why, I can take my oath to one thing —"

"And that is?"

"That, on Jean Oullier's word, he does n't love you."

Bertha shrugged her shoulders disdainfully; but none the less the blow struck home.

She almost hated the old Vendean.

"Look to getting your men together, my poor Jean," said she.

"I obey you, mademoiselle," the Chouan replied, moving toward the door.

Bertha left him without deigning to glance at him again.

Before leaving the château, Oullier called the peasant who had brought the news.

"Did you see any one go into the Picaut house before the soldiers?" he asked him.

"Joseph's house or Pascal's?"

"Pascal's."

"Yes, Master Jean Oullier."

"And who was the person?"

"The mayor of La Logerie."

"You say that he went into Pascal's house?"

"I am sure of it."

"Did you see him?"

"As plainly as I see you."

"Which way did he go when he came out?"

"He took the Machecoul path."

"By which the soldiers arrived a moment later, did they not?"

"Exactly! There was n't a quarter of an hour between his going away and their coming."

"Very well," said Jean.

"Oh, Courtin! Courtin!" he continued, shaking his clinched fist in the direction of La Logerie, "you are tempting Providence. My dog shot yesterday and this treachery to-day! My patience is exhausted!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

MASTER JACQUES' RABBITS.

To the southward of Machecoul there were three forests which formed a triangle about the village of Légé. They were called the forests of Touvois, Grandes-Landes, and La Roche-Servièrre.

The territorial importance of these forests, considered separately, is very small; but, lying barely three kilometres apart, they are connected by hedges and fields of furze and broom which are more plentiful thereabouts than in any other part of La Vendée, and thus form a very considerable agglomeration of heavily wooded land.

The inevitable result of this topographical dispensation was that these forests were perfect hot-beds of rebellion, where, in periods of civil commotion, all the unruly and insurrectionary elements fermented before overflowing into the neighboring districts.

The village of Légé was not only the native place of the famous physician Jolly, but was almost constantly the headquarters of Charette during the great war; it was to Légé, lying in the midst of this girdle of woods, that he would come for shelter after a reverse, to recruit his decimated forces, and prepare for fresh conflicts.

In 1832, although the road from Nantes to Sables d'Olonne, which passed through Légé, had somewhat modified its strategical position, its hilly and wooded environs were again one of the most ardent centres of the projected movement.

The impenetrable thickets of holly and brake which grew in the shade of the three surrounding forests, sheltered many bands of rebels, whose ranks were filling up day by day, and which served as a nucleus for the formation of the revolutionary divisions of the Retz country.

The overhauling of these woods which the authorities had ordered, and the battues which they had resorted to, produced no result. Common report had it that the insurgents had made underground caverns like those which the first Chouans dug in the forests of Gralla, and safely hidden there, defied all the attempts to hunt them down.

On this occasion common report was not at fault.

Toward the close of the day when we left Michel setting out from the Château de Souday on the marquis's horse for the Picaut abode, the person who had happened to be standing behind one of the primeval beeches which surround the glade of Folleron in the forest of Touvois, would have witnessed a strange spectacle.

Just as the sun, sinking below the horizon, was giving place to a sort of twilight; just when the thickets were enveloped in a shadow which seemed to rise from the earth, and the last dying ray of the sun was lighting up the tree-tops, such a person would have seen approach him an individual whom, by a slight exertion of the imagination, he might have taken for a supernatural being; and who advanced very slowly, looking cautiously about him on all sides, — a process which seemed, at first sight, to be made much more easy for him by the possession of two heads, to keep a double watch upon his security.

This individual, clad in filthy rags, with a coat and an apology for a pair of trousers of which the original material had completely disappeared under the thousand

and one pieces of all colors with which he had tried to repair dilapidations, seemed, as we have said, to belong to a race of bicephalous monsters, which should occupy a distinguished place among the freaks which Nature delights to create in her wayward hours.

The two heads were quite distinct, and although apparently joined to the same trunk, were very far from having a family resemblance to each other.

Beside a huge, brick-red face, pitted with small-pox, and almost wholly covered by an unkempt beard, appeared another less repulsive visage, astute and mischievous in its ugliness, while the first expressed nothing but idiocy, capable sometimes of becoming brutish ferocity.

These two distinctive physiognomies belonged to two former acquaintances of ours whom we first met at Montaignu fair, — to Aubin Courte-Joie, the Montaignu inn-keeper, and to (we ask the reader's pardon for writing the somewhat too expressive name, which we do not think that we ought to change) Trigaud *the Vermin*, the beggar of herculean strength, who, as will doubtless be remembered, played a prominent part in the *émeute* at Montaignu, by gliding under the general's horse and pulling the general himself out of his saddle.

Following out a very clever idea, of which we have already said a word, Aubin Courte-Joie had completed his physical equipment with the help of this beast of burden whom he had fallen in with by chance. In exchange for the two legs he had left on the Ancenis road, the cripple adopted two legs of steel, which knew not what weariness was, which shrank from no task, which served him as his own legs never had done, which executed his will without a murmur, and which had arrived at the point, after the partnership had lasted some little

time, of divining Aubin's very thoughts, — though they were indicated only by a single word, or gesture, or a simple pressure of the hand upon his shoulder, or of the knee upon his flank.

The most extraordinary part of it was that Trigaud the Vermin was by no means the least contented member of the corporation; quite the contrary. His dull intellect was equal to the task of understanding that Courte-Joie's efforts were all directed toward the end which had his entire sympathy; the few words about "Whites" and "Blues" which came to his enormous ears, which were always pricked up and wide open, proved to him that, in acting as locomotive to the inn-keeper, he was helping on a cause, devotion to which was the only emotion that had survived the loss of his brain power. He was proud of it; his confidence in Aubin Courte-Joie was unlimited; he was proud of being bound body and soul to a mind whose superiority he recognized, and he had attached himself to the man who might be called his master with the self-abnegation which characterizes all attachments in which instinct is the moving power.

Trigaud carried Aubin sometimes on his back, sometimes on his shoulders, as tenderly as a mother carries her child; he was extremely careful of him, and lavished attentions upon him which seemed inconsistent with the idiotic mind of the poor devil, who never looked to see whether he was tearing his own feet to pieces on thorns and sharp stones, but was careful to thrust aside every little twig which might bruise the body or scratch the face of his rider.

When they were nearly a third of the way across the clearing, Courte-Joie touched Trigaud's shoulder with his finger, and the giant stopped short. Thereupon the inn-keeper, without speaking, pointed to a great

stone at the foot of an enormous beech in a corner of the clearing.

The giant went to the tree, picked up the stone, and awaited further orders.

"Now strike three blows," said Aubin.

Trigaud did as he was told, striking the second blow immediately after the first, and the third after a certain interval.

At this signal, which echoed dully on the trunk of the tree, a little square of turf and moss was raised, and a head emerged from the ground.

"Ah, you're on duty yourself at the mouth of the cave to-day, are you, Master Jacques?" said Aubin, evidently pleased to find an intimate acquaintance so readily.

"*Dame! gars* Courte-Joie, it's time to be going to work, you see, and I always prefer to make sure for myself that the neighborhood is clear of hunters before I let my Rabbits out."

"You do well, Master Jacques, you do well," rejoined Aubin, — "to-day particularly; for there are plenty of guns about in the open."

"Ah, tell me about it!"

"Willingly."

"Will you come in?"

"Oh, no, Jacques, not much! We are warm enough already, my boy, — is it not, Trigaud?"

The giant gave a grunt which, taking a good deal for granted, might have passed for an affirmative reply.

"Ha! so he speaks now, does he?" said Master Jacques. "They used to say he was dumb. Do you know you're mighty lucky, *gars* Trigaud, that our Aubin has taken such a fancy to you? Here you are now, almost a man, — to say nothing of being sure of

your porridge, which all the dogs can't say, even those of the Château de Souday."

The beggar opened his huge mouth and set up a hoarse, cackling laugh, which he did not finish, however; for a gesture from Aubin relegated to the cavities of the larynx that outburst of hilarity, which his mighty lung power rendered dangerous.

"Not so loud, not so loud, Trigaud!" said he, roughly.

"He always acts as if he were in the public square of Montaignu, the poor fool," he said to Master Jacques.

"Well, if you won't come in, I'll turn the boys out. You were right, my Courte-Joie, it is infernally hot inside! Some of them were saying that they were roasted; but, you know, the scamps are forever complaining."

"They're not like Trigaud," remarked Aubin, dealing the elephant, on whose shoulders he was perched, a hearty fisticuff on the head, by way of caress.

Trigaud accompanied his loud guffaw with a nod of the head, overflowing with gratitude for the marks of esteem with which Courte-Joie honored him.

Master Jacques, whom we have thus presented to our readers, but whose acquaintance they have still to make, was a man of from fifty to fifty-five years, with all the exterior appearance of a well-to-do farmer of the Retz country.

His hair was long, and fell upon his shoulders; but his beard, by way of reprisal, was cut close, and trimmed with the greatest care. He wore a very decent cloth coat, almost modern in cut when compared with those which are still to this day fashionable in Vendée; a waistcoat, also of cloth, with broad stripes, every alternate one being of chamois; trousers of dark brown canvas and blue checked gaiters were the only portions of his costume which resembled that of his compatriots.

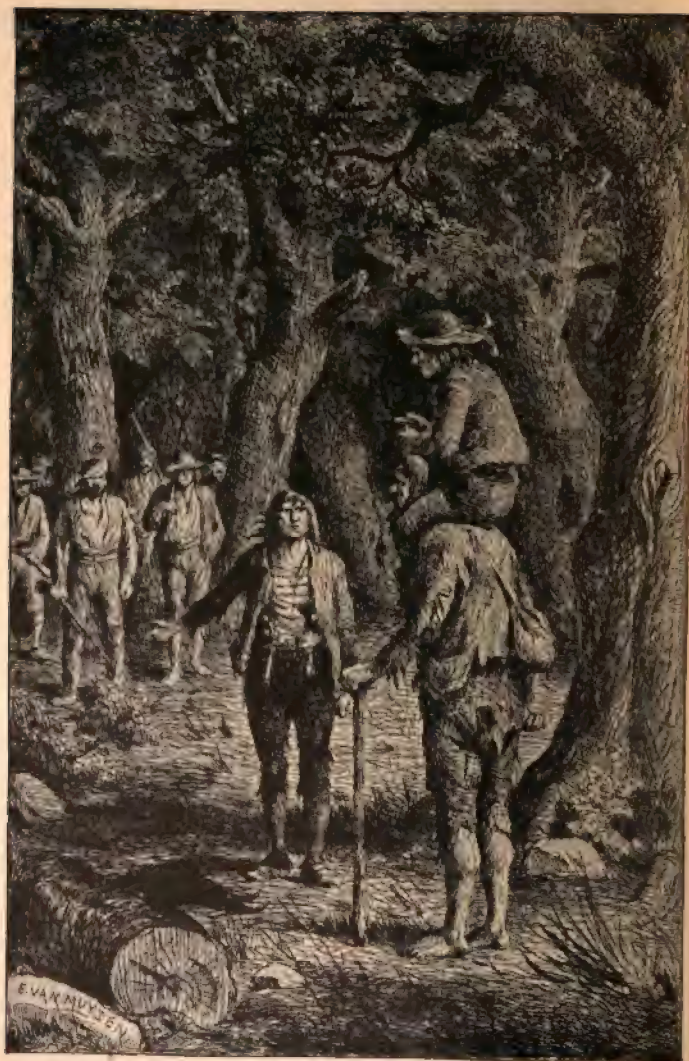
A pair of pistols, whose shining butts projected from his coat-pockets, were the only war-like ornaments he was wearing at that moment.

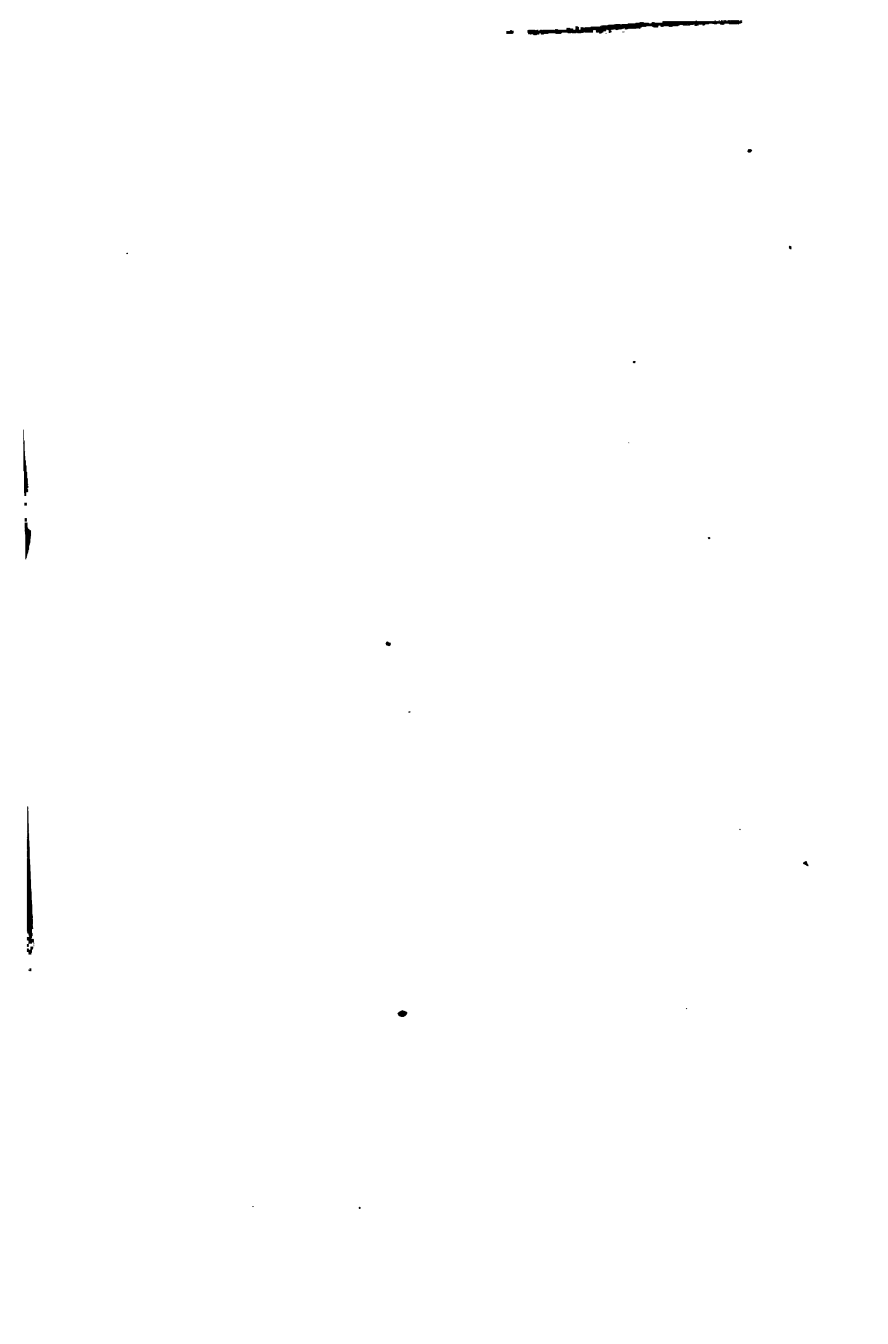
With all his calm and innocent physiognomy, Master Jacques was nothing less than the leader of one of the most audacious bands of rebels in the country, and the most determined Chouan within a circuit of ten leagues, where he enjoyed a formidable reputation.

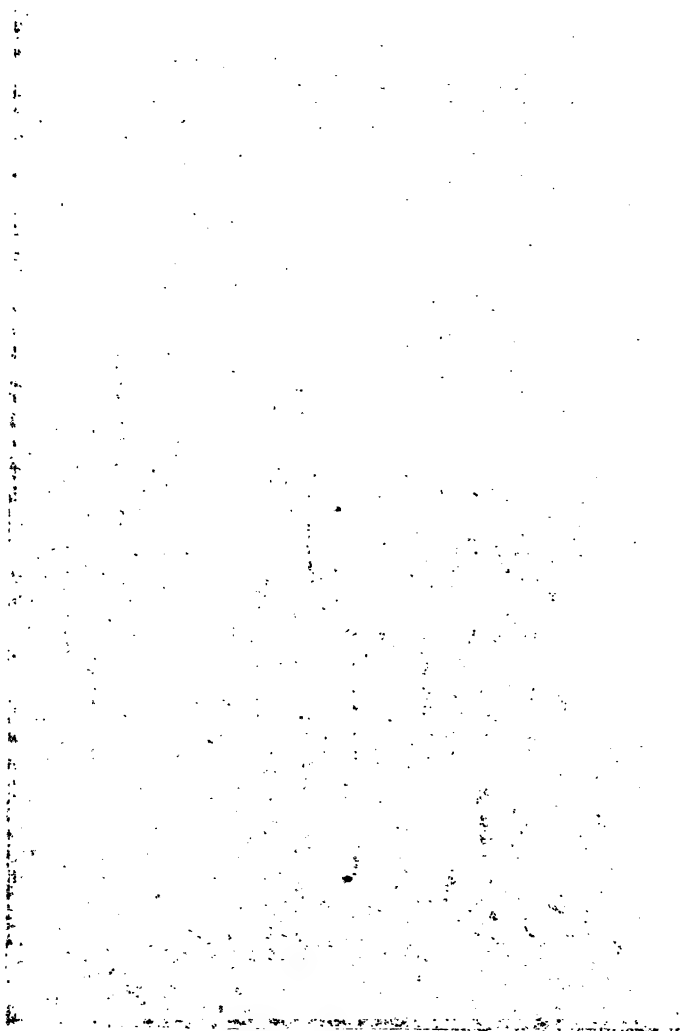
Master Jacques had never seriously laid down his arms during the fifteen years of Napoleon's actual reign. With two or three men, even more frequently entirely alone, he had defied whole brigades. His courage and his good luck seemed almost supernatural, and gave rise, among the superstitious population of the Bocage, to the idea that he was invulnerable, and that the bullets of the Blues were powerless to harm him. Thus it was that, after the Revolution of July, when Master Jacques announced, in the early days of August, 1830, that he proposed to take the field, all the rebels in the neighborhood flocked to his standard, and speedily formed a troop, with which he at once inaugurated the second series of his exploits as a partisan.

After talking a few moments with Aubin Courte-Joie, Master Jacques, who, in order to converse with the newcomer, had put first his head and then his shoulders out of the hole, stooped down and emitted a low, curiously modulated whistle.

At this signal there was a sort of buzzing, like that which comes from a bee-hive, in the bowels of the earth; at once a sort of skylight, of considerable size, covered like the smaller opening with turf and moss and dead leaves, so as to be indistinguishable from its surroundings, rose into the air, between two bushes, supported by posts at the four corners.



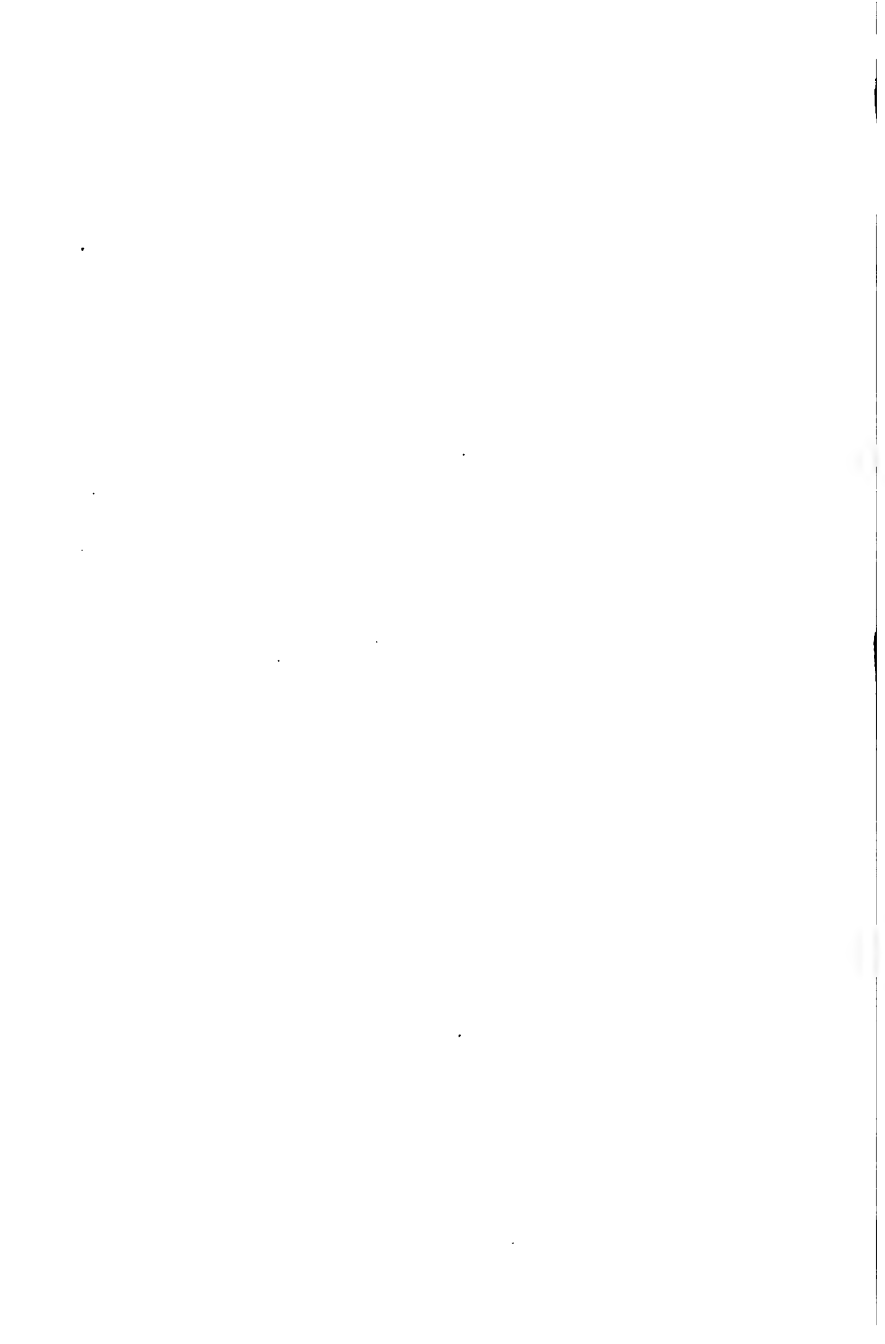




“‘YES,’ SAID MASTER JACQUES, ‘THE
WOLVES ARE OUT!’”

Drawn by E. Van Muyden.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL. I. 489.



As it rose, it disclosed the mouth of a sort of silo, very broad and very deep, whence issued one by one a score of men.

The costumes of these men had none of the picturesque elegance characteristic of the brigands whom we see emerge from card-board caverns on the stage of the Opera-Comique; far from it. Some of them had uniforms strikingly similar to that of Trigaud the Vermin; others, and they were the most dandified, wore cloth coats; but the majority were clad in coarse canvas.

The same variety, too, was noticeable in their armament. Three or four muskets, half a dozen fowling-pieces, and as many pistols formed the stock of firearms; but the display of side-arms was much less respectable, for it consisted of the sword belonging to Master Jacques, two pikes dating from the first war, and eight or ten pitch-forks, carefully sharpened by their owners.

When all these worthy fellows had come out into the clearing, Master Jacques took his seat upon the trunk of a felled tree; Trigaud deposited Aubin beside him, and withdrew a short distance, remaining within call of his partner, however.

"Yes, my Courte-Joie," said Master Jacques, "the wolves are out; but it pleases me all the same to see that you put yourself out to warn me. But, let's see!" he suddenly exclaimed, "how comes it that you're here? You were collared at the same time as Jean Oullier. He escaped, crossing the Pont-Farcy ford,—that does n't surprise me in the least; but how the devil did you do it, my poor, legless boy?"

"How about Trigaud's legs?" replied Courte-Joie, with a laugh. "What do you take them for? I pricked the gendarme who had hold of me,—it seems that it must have hurt him, for he let me go,—and the fist of my *com-*

père Trigaud did the rest. Who told you about my arrest, Master Jacques?"

Master Jacques shrugged his shoulders, carelessly, and without answering the question, which doubtless seemed trifling to him, he said,—

"Look here! you don't happen to have come to tell me that the day is changed, do you?"

"No, it's still the 24th."

"So much the better!" said Master Jacques; "for, upon my soul, they put me out of all patience with their postponements and their stinginess. Is there any need of so much backing and filling, in God's name, about simply taking one's gun, saying good-by to the wife, and leaving the house?"

"Patience! you have n't much longer to wait, Master Jacques."

"Four days!" he growled.

"Well, what's four days?"

"Three too many to my mind. I have n't had any such chance as Jean Oullier, who was able to get a shot or two at them last night at the Saut de Baugé."

"Yes, so the boy told me."

"Unfortunately," rejoined Master Jacques, "they took a cruel revenge."

"How?"

"Don't you know?"

"No; I come straight from Montaigu."

"Of course, then, you can't know of it."

"Well, what has happened?"

"In Pascal Picaut's house they killed a fine young fellow whom I thought a great deal of, although I think little of his kind as a rule."

"Who was it?"

"The Comte de Bonneville."

"The devil! when did it happen?"

"This very afternoon about two."

"How in the devil did you learn that here in your burrow, Master Jacques?"

"Don't you know that I have a way of finding out everything that's useful to me?"

"In that case I don't know that it's worth while for me to tell you what brings me here."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because you probably know it already."

"That may very well be."

"I wish I were sure of it."

"Nonsense."

"Faith, yes, it would relieve me from a very disagreeable commission, which I undertook very reluctantly."

"Aha! you come from *those gentlemen*, then."

Master Jacques pronounced the words we have italicized in a tone half way between contempt and menace.

"Yes, primarily," replied Aubin; "and then Jean Oullier, whom I happened to meet, also gave me a message for you."

"Jean Oullier? Ah, coming from him you are welcome! He's a fellow I love, is Jean Oullier; he has done one thing in his life which made a friend of me."

"What was that?"

"It's his secret, not mine. Tell me first what these gentry in the fine houses want of me."

"It was the leader of your division who sent me to you."

"The Marquis de Souday?"

"Exactly."

"Well, what does he want?"

"He complains that your too frequent expeditions are attracting the attention of the Government troops; that you are irritating the people of the towns by your

exactions, and that in this way you will paralyze the general uprising in advance, by making it more difficult."

"Damnation! why don't they begin this uprising of theirs sooner then? God knows we've been waiting long enough! As far as I am concerned, I have waited ever since the 30th July."

"Then, too —"

"What! is n't that all?"

"No, he orders you —"

"He orders me?"

"Wait a moment! You can obey him or not, as you please; but he orders you —"

"Just listen to this, Courte-Joie: whatever orders he gives me, I swear to one thing in advance."

"What is it?"

"To disobey him. Now, fire away; I am listening!"

"Very well; he orders you to remain quietly in your quarters until the 24th, and especially not to stop any diligences or travellers on the high-road, as you have been doing lately."

"Well, now, I solemnly swear," retorted Master Jacques, "that the very first person who goes from Lége to Saint Étienne, or from Saint Étienne to Lége, this evening, shall pass through my hands! As for you, you shall stay here, *gars* Courte-Joie, and then you can tell him to-morrow what you see here, and that will be my answer."

"Oh, no!" said Aubin.

"What do you mean by 'no'?"

"You won't do that, Master Jacques."

"*Pardieu!* yes, I will do it, too."

"Jacques! Jacques!" the inn-keeper persisted; "you understand that by such means you seriously compromise our cause."

"Possibly; but I will prove to that old aristocrat that I propose that myself and my men shall remain entirely outside of his division, and that his orders will never be executed here. And, now that you have done with the 'orders' of the Marquis de Souday, go on to the commission of Jean Oullier."

"All right! I met him just at the Servières bridge. He asked me where I was going; and when he found out that I was on my way here, he said, '*Parbleu!* that will be just what we want! Ask Master Jacques if he has any objection to vacating for a few days, and leaving his burrow at some one's disposal.'"

"Aha! Did he give you the name of that some one, my Courte-Joie?"

"No."

"Never mind! Whoever it may be, if he comes in the name of Jean Oullier, he will be welcome, for I am sure that Jean would not disturb my housekeeping if it wasn't worth while. He's not like that parcel of lazy, do-nothing *gentlemen*, who make all the noise, and leave us all the hard work to do."

"There are good men among them, and bad ones too," said Aubin, philosophically.

"When will this person come that he wishes to stow away?" asked Master Jacques.

"To-night."

"How shall I recognize him?"

"Jean Oullier himself will bring him."

"Good! Is that all he asks?"

"No; he wishes you, in addition, to be very careful to keep all suspicious people away from the forest to-night, and to keep watch in the whole neighborhood, especially the Grand-Lieu path."

"There you see! the divisional commander *orders*

me to stop no one, and Jean Oullier asks me to keep the road clear of Red Breeches and patriot dogs; that's another reason why I should keep to the word I just gave you. How is Jean Oullier to know that I expect him?"

"If he may come, if there are no troops in Touvois, I am to notify him to that effect."

"How?"

"By a holly-branch with just fifteen leaves planted in the middle of the road at the cross-road of La Benaste, with the end turned toward Touvois."

"Did he give you any countersign? Jean Oullier is not at all likely to have forgotten that."

"Yes; he will say, 'Vaincre,' and the reply should be, 'Vendée.'"

"Very well!" said Master Jacques, rising and walking to the centre of the clearing.

He called four of his men, and said a few words to them in a low tone, whereupon they started off in four different directions, without replying.

After a few moments, during which Master Jacques sent for a jug, which seemed to contain *eau-de-vie*, and offered it to his companion, four other men appeared from the points of the compass toward which the first four had directed their steps. They were sentinels who had been relieved by their comrades.

"Is there anything new?" Master Jacques asked them.

Three of them replied in the negative.

"Well, have you nothing to say?" he asked of the fourth; "you had the best post."

"The Nantes diligence was escorted by four *gendarmes*."

"Aha, you have a good scent, my boy! You smell

the coin. And to think that there are people who would like to put a stop to it! But never fear, my friends, we're on hand!"

"What's the report?" inquired Courte-Joie.

"No Red Breeches in the neighborhood. Tell Jean Oullier to bring on his friends."

"All right!" said Courte-Joie, who had been putting a holly branch in the shape agreed upon with Jean Oullier, during the questioning of the out-posts,—"all right, I will send Trigaud.

"Come here, La Vermine," said he, turning in the giant's direction.

Master Jacques stopped him.

"Are you mad, to part with your legs?" said he. "Suppose you should need him! Zounds! as if we hadn't two score men here, who ask nothing better than a chance to stretch their legs! Wait and you will see!—Ho, there! Joseph Picaut!" he cried.

At the summons, our old acquaintance, who was enjoying a much needed sleep on the grass, sat up.

"Joseph Picaut!" Master Jacques said again, impatiently.

Picaut decided to get up, and came and stood in front of the leader.

"Here's a branch of holly; you will be careful not to lose a single leaf from it, and you will carry it at once to the cross-road of La Benaste on the road to Machecoul opposite the Calvary, and set it up with the end turned toward Thouvois."

Master Jacques crossed himself at the word "Calvary."

"But—" said Picaut, sullenly.

"What's that!—*but*?"

"Four hours of such a race as I have just been running have used my legs up completely."

"Joseph Picaut," Master Jacques retorted, in a voice as strident and metallic as the voice of a trumpet, "you left your parish to join my band. You came of your own accord; I didn't ask you. Now, just remember one thing: that at the first word of argument, I strike; and at the first grumble, I kill."

As he spoke, Master Jacques drew one of his pistols, grasped it by the barrel, and dealt the peasant a powerful blow on the head with the but-end.

The concussion was so violent that Picaut was half-stunned, and fell upon one knee; except for the thickness of his felt hat, his skull would have been fractured, in all likelihood.

"Now go!" said Master Jacques, looking calmly to see if the shock had knocked the powder off the pan.

Picaut, without a word rose, shook himself, and hurried away.

Courte-Joie followed him with his eyes until he disappeared.

"So you have that fellow in your band, have you?" he asked.

"Yes, don't say anything to me about him."

"Have you had him long?"

"Only a few hours."

"An undesirable acquisition, he is."

"I don't altogether agree to that; the fellow is brave as was his late father, whom I knew; only he needs to learn the ways of my Rabbits, and accommodate himself to the burrow. That will come! that will come in time!"

"Oh, I don't doubt it. You have a marvellous talent for bringing them around."

"*Dame!* I didn't begin yesterday. But it's time for my round, and I must leave you, my poor Courte-

Joie. It's understood, then, is it, that Jean Oullier's friends can make themselves at home here? As for the divisional commander, he shall have my reply to-night. Have you told me all that *gars* Oullier said?"

"Yes."

"Rummage in your memory."

"That's all."

"Enough said, then. If the burrow suits, we will give it up to him and his people. I am not troubled about my boys; rabbits are like mice,—they have more than one hole. I'll see you very soon again, *gars* Aubin; and meanwhile, have some supper. Look, I can see them getting ready to serve it up down there."

Master Jacques went down into what he called his burrow, and came back a moment later, armed with a carbine, the priming of which he examined with the greatest care.

Then he disappeared among the trees.

Meanwhile the clearing presented a most animated and picturesque appearance.

A great fire had been lighted in the cavern, and its reflection through the aperture lighted up the bushes in most fantastic and curious fashion.

At this fire was cooking the evening meal of the insurgents, who were scattered about over the clearing. Some were kneeling, telling their beads; others were seated, and singing in a half-voice those national ditties whose plaintive and touching harmonies accorded perfectly with the general character of the surroundings. Two Bretons, lying on the ground at the mouth of the cave, full in the glare of the fire, were disputing the possession of divers coins of the realm by the agency of two huckle-bones, each face of which was painted a different color; while a youth, with the sickly yellow complexion of an inhabi-

tant of the swamps, was endeavoring, with no great success to remove the thick coating of rust from the barrel and hammer of an old carbine.

Aubin, accustomed to scenes of this description, paid no attention to it. Trigaud had fashioned a sort of couch for him with leaves; he seated himself thereon, and was smoking his pipe as tranquilly as if he had been in his *cabaret* at Montaigu.

Suddenly he fancied he heard in the distance a cry of alarm,— the cry of the screech-owl, prolonged, however, in a way which signified danger.

Courte-Joie whistled softly, to enjoin silence upon the rebels; almost at the same instant a pistol-shot rang out not more than a thousand feet away.

In the twinkling of an eye, buckets of water, kept at hand for the express purpose, were thrown upon the fire; the "sky-light," was lowered, the trap closed, and Master Jacques' rabbits, Aubin Courte-Joie, upon his *compère's* shoulders, included, had scattered in all directions awaiting their leader's signal for action.

CHAPTER XLV.

TREATS OF THE POSSIBLE DANGER OF TRAVELLING
IN THE WOODS IN BAD COMPANY.

It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening, when Petit-Pierre, accompanied by Baron Michel, who had become his guide in place of poor Bonneville, left the hut where he had incurred such deadly peril.

It was not, as we can well understand, without deep and intense emotion that he crossed the threshold of that room where lay the cold and lifeless body of the gallant youth whom he had known but a few days, but whom he had learned to love, as one loves friends of many years' standing.

His valiant heart almost failed him as he thought that he must thenceforth face alone the perils which poor Bonneville had shared with him for four days past; the royal cause had lost but one soldier, and yet Petit-Pierre felt as if he had lost a whole army.

It was the first grain of the bloody seed which was once more to be sown in Vendean soil; and Petit-Pierre asked himself with anguish at his heart, if it was likely to produce, this time, aught but sorrow and regret.

He did not insult Marianne by commending his comrade's body to her care. Strange as the woman's ideas seemed to him, he was at no loss to appreciate the elevation of her sentiments, and to discern how much there was of true kindness of heart, and profound religious conviction, beneath her rough exterior.

When Michel had brought the horse to the door, he reminded Petit-Pierre that moments were precious, and that their friends were awaiting them; the young peasant thereupon turned to the widow.

"How can I ever thank you for what you have done for me?" he said, giving her his hand.

"I have done nothing for you," replied Marianne; "I have paid a debt, fulfilled an oath, — that's all."

"So you don't even care for my gratitude?" asked Petit-Pierre, with tears in his eyes.

"If you insist that you owe me anything," said the widow, "when you pray for those who die for you, add a few words in behalf of those who die because of you."

"Do you think, then, that God will listen to my prayers?" said Petit-Pierre, as a slight smile stole across his features.

"Yes, because I think you are destined to suffer."

"At least accept this," rejoined Petit-Pierre, taking from his neck a medallion attached to a slender cord of black silk; "it is only silver, but the Holy Father blessed it, and told me as he gave it to me that God would grant the prayers offered upon it, if they were just and pious."

Marianne took the medallion.

"Thanks," said she. "I will pray to God upon this medallion to avert civil war from our land, and to maintain our grandeur and our liberty."

"Good!" rejoined Petit-Pierre; "the last part of your prayer coincides entirely with mine."

With that he bestrode the horse with the assistance of Michel, who held his stirrup; and after a last farewell to the widow, they both disappeared behind the hedge.

For some time Petit-Pierre, with his head bent for-

ward upon his chest, heedless of his surroundings, seemed a prey to deep and gloomy reflection.

At last he made a mighty effort, and shaking off his depression, he turned to Michel, who was walking beside him.

"Monsieur," said he, "I already know two things about you which entitle you to my full confidence: the first is that we were indebted to you last evening for the timely warning that the troops were marching upon the Château de Souday; the second, that you came to-day to help me in the name of the marquis and his charming daughters. There is a third fact which I have still to learn: who are you? My friends are so rare, in my present plight, that I desire to know their names, and can promise not to forget them."

"I am Baron Michel de la Logerie," replied the youth.

"De la Logerie? Wait a moment, monsieur; I am sure that I have heard that name before."

"True, madame, poor Bonneville was conducting your Highness to my mother's house when —"

"Here, here! what's that you say? *Your Highness!* Whom are you talking to? I see no 'Highness' here; I see only a poor peasant called Petit-Pierre."

"Of course; if Madame will forgive me —"

"Again!"

"I'll try once more: poor Bonneville was conducting you to my mother's house, when I had the honor of meeting you, and guiding you to the Château de Souday."

"So that I already have a threefold cause for gratitude to you. Oh, that does n't frighten me; and however great the services you have rendered, I hope that the day will come when I can square it all up with you."

Michel stammered some words which did not reach his companion's ear, but the words of the latter seemed none the less to have produced a deep impression upon him; for, from that moment, while conforming so far as possible to the injunction laid upon him, he redoubled his attentions and respect.

"But I have an impression," resumed Petit-Pierre, after a moment's thought, "that, judging from what M. de Bonneville told me, your family is not supposed to be precisely devoted to the Royalist cause."

"In fact, mad — mon —"

"Call me Petit-Pierre, or else don't call me anything; it's the only way to avoid embarrassment. In that case, I must owe the honor of having you for my knight to recent conversion!"

"Conversion easy to make! At my age, opinions have not become convictions,— they are simple sentiments."

"You are very young!" said Petit-Pierre, looking attentively at his guide.

"I am just in my twenty-first year."

Petit-Pierre sighed.

"That's just the right age," said he, "to love and to fight."

The baron heaved a tremendous sigh, and Petit-Pierre smiled imperceptibly, as he heard it.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "that sigh went a long way toward disclosing the cause of the political conversion we were just discussing. My life on it, that there's a pair of lovely eyes somewhere which are no strangers to you, and that if Louis Philippe's soldiers should search you at this moment, they would find on you a scarf which is more precious because of the hands which embroidered it than of the principles of which its color is the emblem."

"I can assure you, madame," stammered Michel, "that my determination is not due to that cause."

"Come, come, don't try to deny the impeachment. It's true chivalry, Monsieur Michel. We do not forget, either because we are descended from them or because we wish to resemble them, that the knights of old placed women almost on a level with God and quite on a level with kings, mingling all three in the same devise. You don't propose to be ashamed of falling in love, I trust? Why, it's your very strongest claim to my sympathy. *Ventre-saint-gris!* as Henry IV. used to say, with an army of twenty thousand lovers I would undertake to conquer, not France alone, but the world! Give us the name of your fair one, Monsieur le Baron de la Logerie."

"Oh," said Michel, evidently tremendously scandalized.

"Ah, you're very discreet, my young friend! I congratulate you. It's a quality so much the more precious because it becomes more rare day by day. But, then, to a travelling companion, if you make him swear to keep the secret, you may venture to tell it, baron, believe me. Come, do you want me to help you? Suppose we say that at this moment we are journeying toward the lady of your thoughts?"

"You are right," said Michel.

"Suppose we say that it is neither more nor less than one of our lovely Amazons of Souday?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* who can have told you that?"

"Well, I congratulate you, my young comrade. 'She-wolves' though they call them, I look upon them as noble and trusty hearts, abundantly capable of bestowing perfect happiness upon those whom they choose. You are wealthy, Monsieur de la Logerie?"

"Alas, yes!" replied Michel.

"All the better, man,—not alas; for you can enrich your wife, which is in my opinion a great advantage. However, as there is a certain amount of rough sailing to be got through with in every love affair, if Petit-Pierre can help you in any way, you have but to call upon him; he will be only too happy to show his gratitude in that way for the service you have rendered him. But some one is coming, or I'm very much mistaken. Listen!"

Footsteps were indeed audible at some distance, but approaching.

"I'm inclined to think that it's only one man," said Petit-Pierre.

"Very true. But we ought to be on our guard, none the less," replied the baron; "and I am going to ask you to let me mount behind you."

"Willingly; but are you tired already?"

"No, indeed, I'm not. But I am well known in the neighborhood, you see; and if any one meets me on foot, walking beside a mounted peasant and leading his horse by the head, as Haman led Mordecai, it will certainly set him thinking."

"Bravo! What you say is as true as Gospel, and I begin to think that something may be made of you."

Petit-Pierre alighted; and as Michel leaped lightly into the saddle, he mounted modestly behind him.

The person who was approaching them had got within hailing distance before they were fairly settled in their new positions, and they heard him stop.

"Oho!" said Petit-Pierre; "it seems that this traveller is as much afraid of us as we are of all travellers."

"Who goes there?" said Michel, in a gruff voice.

"Why, it's Monsieur le Baron!" the man replied,

advancing. "Deuce take me if I expected to meet you on the road at such an hour!"

"You were quite right when you said that you were well known," whispered Petit-Pierre, laughing.

"Yes, unluckily," said Michel, in a tone which gave his companion to understand that they were in a dangerous situation.

"Why, who is the man?" Petit-Pierre asked.

"Courtin, my tenant-farmer, — the same whom we suspect of having given information of your presence at Marianne Picaut's. Get out of sight behind me!" he continued, in a sharp, imperative tone, which sufficiently expressed the urgency of the crisis.

Petit-Pierre made haste to follow that counsel.

"Is it you, Courtin?" Michel said, while Petit-Pierre was doing his best to efface himself.

"Yes, it's me," the farmer replied.

"Where are you from, yourself?"

"From Machecoul. I went there to buy an ox."

"Well, where's your ox? I don't see him."

"I could n't make a trade. With all this damned politics, business is at a stand-still and there's nothing at all in the market," said Courtin, who, as he spoke, was scrutinizing, as closely as the darkness would permit, the horse ridden by Michel.

As the latter seemed disposed to let the conversation drop, Courtin continued, —

"How's this, Monsieur le Baron? Your back still seems to be turned upon La Logerie."

"There's nothing wonderful about that; I am going to Souday."

"May I be permitted to remark that you are not altogether on the right road?"

"Oh, I know that well enough; but I am afraid of

finding the direct road guarded, so I am making a *détour*."

"In that case, and if you are really going to Souday," said Courtin, "I think I ought to give you a bit of advice."

"What is it? Advice, if sincerely offered, is always welcome."

"You will find the cage empty."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true; and that's not where you must go, Monsieur le Baron, if you want to find the bird that keeps you running around the country."

"Who told you so, Courtin?" said Michel, guiding his horse all the while in such fashion as to keep constantly face to face with his interlocutor, and thus hide Petit-Pierre.

"Who told me?" exclaimed Courtin. "*Pardieu!* my eyes! I saw them all come out, — the devil take them! They passed me on the road to Grandes-Landes."

"Are there soldiers in that direction?" asked the baron.

Petit-Pierre thought the last question ill-advised, and pinched his arm.

"Soldiers?" Courtin repeated; "so you're afraid of the soldiers, too! Well, if that's so, I advise you not to venture in the open country to-night; for you can't go a league in any direction without spying bayonets. Do better than that, Monsieur Michel —"

"What do you want me to do? Tell me; and if it's really better, I'll do it."

"Come back with me to La Logerie. You will make your mother very happy; and she's in a sad state now, knowing that you are abroad with such evil notions in your head."

"Master Courtin," said Michel, "let me give you a little advice, in my turn."

"What is it, Monsieur le Baron?"

"To hold your tongue."

"No, I will not hold my tongue," replied the farmer, with an affectation of great sorrow. "No; it's too hard to see my young master exposed to a thousand dangers, and all for one —"

"Be quiet, Courtin!"

"For one of those cursed She-wolves, whom the son of a mere peasant, as I am, would have none of!"

"Wretch! Will you hold your peace?" cried the youth, threatening Courtin, with hunting-whip uplifted.

This movement, which Courtin doubtless intended to provoke, caused Michel's horse to take a step forward; and the mayor thus found himself abreast of the two cavaliers.

"Pardon me, if I offend you, Monsieur le Baron," said he, in the tone of a crying child; "but I have n't slept for two nights, thinking about it."

Petit-Pierre shuddered as he recognized the same wheedling, hypocritical inflection in the mayor's voice which he had already heard in the Widow Picaut's cottage, and which had been followed, as soon as he took his departure, by such melancholy events. He made a second silent appeal to Michel, which was intended to mean, "Let us get rid of this man at any price."

"Very well," said Michel. "Go your way, and let us go ours."

Courtin started, as if he then noticed for the first time that the baron had some one behind him.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" said he; "you are not alone? Ah, I understand, Monsieur le Baron, why what I said

to you wounded you! Come, monsieur, whoever you may be, doubtless you will show more common-sense than your young friend. Join me in impressing upon him that he has nothing to gain in defying the laws and the force which the Government has at its disposal, as he seems inclined to do just to please those She-wolves."

"Once more, Courtin," said Michel, in tones full of menace, "get out of the way! I act as seems good to me, and I consider you damned impertinent to undertake to judge my conduct."

But Courtin, whose soft-spoken persistence we have seen many instances of, seemed disposed to hold his ground until he had seen the features of the mysterious personage whom his young master had on behind, and who kept his back turned to him as well as he could.

"Come, now," said he, trying to impart to his words an accent of most perfect good faith, "to-morrow you shall do as you please; but for to-night, at least, come and have a good night's sleep at your farmhouse, and bring along the person, man or woman, who is with you. I swear to you, Monsieur le Baron, that it's dangerous to be abroad to-night."

"There can be no danger for my companion or myself, for we don't meddle in politics. Look here! what are you doing to my saddle, Courtin?" exclaimed the youth, as he noticed his tenant going through some inexplicable performance.

"Nothing, Monsieur Michel; nothing at all," replied Courtin, with perfect suavity. "You won't listen to my advice or my entreaties, then?"

"No; go your own way, and let me continue my journey."

"Go on, then!" said the farmer, in his crafty way; "and God be with you! Remember, please, that your

poor Courtin did everything that lay in his power to prevent the evil that is likely to ensue."

As he spoke, Courtin at last made up his mind to stand aside. Michel put spurs to his horse, and galloped away.

"Faster! faster!" said Petit-Pierre. "Yes, I recognized in him the man who is responsible for poor Bonneville's death! Let us get away as fast as possible. That man brings ill-luck with him!"

The young baron urged his horse to his utmost speed. But he had gone scarcely a dozen rods when the saddle turned, and the two riders fell heavily upon the stones.

Petit-Pierre was the first to regain his feet.

"Are you hurt?" he asked Michel, as he, too, rose.

"No; but I am wondering how —"

"How we came to fall? That's not the important question. We *did* fall, and that's all there is to it. Tighten up the girths again, as quickly as you possibly can!"

"The devil!" ejaculated Michel, who had already put the saddle in place on the animal's back; "both girths are broken at the same height."

"Say rather that they are cut!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "It's one of your infernal Courtin's tricks, and it's not of good omen. Hold! look over there —"

Michel, as Petit-Pierre seized his arm, turned his eyes in the direction indicated; and not an eighth of a league away, in the valley, he saw three or four fires, glimmering in the darkness.

"It's a bivouac," said Petit-Pierre. "If the villain has his suspicions, and he doubtless has, as his road takes him directly by those fires, he will put the Red Breeches on my trail a second time."

"Why, do you suppose that, knowing that I am with you, — I, his master, — he will dare —"

"It's my duty to suppose everything, Monsieur Michel."

"You are right; and we must leave nothing to chance."

"We shall do well to leave the travelled path, then."

"I think so."

"How much time do we need to reach the place where the marquis awaits us, if we are obliged to go on foot?"

"An hour, at least; so we have no time to lose. But what shall we do with the horse? We can't make him climb fences."

"Throw the reins on his neck; he will go back to his stable. And if our friends come across him on the way, they will understand that something must have happened to us and will hunt us up. But hush!"

"What is it?"

"Do you hear nothing?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I believe I do, — the step of horses in the direction of the bivouac."

"You see, it was not without an ulterior design that your worthy farmer cut our girths! Let's be off, my poor baron!"

"But if we leave the horse here, our pursuers will find him and will easily guess that the riders are not far away."

"Wait," said Petit-Pierre, "I have an idea, — the races of the *barberi* in Italy; yes, that's the very thing. Do as I do, Monsieur Michel."

"Command, and I obey."

Petit-Pierre at once set to work. With his delicate hands, at the risk of tearing his fingers to bits, he broke off branches of thorn and holly in the hedge by the

roadside. With these he formed a bundle of some size; and as Michel had done as he saw Petit-Pierre do, they soon had two bundles.

"What are you going to do with them?" queried Michel.

"Tear the mark off your pocket-handkerchief, and give me the rest of it."

Michel obeyed to the letter.

Petit-Pierre tore two strips off the handkerchief and tied the sticks together in two bundles, one of which he fastened under the horse's mane, which was long and silky, the other he tied under his tail.

The poor animal, as he felt the sharp points in his flesh, began to prance and rear, while the object of the operation began to dawn upon the baron's brain.

"Now take off his bridle, so that he won't break his neck," said Petit-Pierre, "and let him go."

The horse was no sooner freed from the detaining rein than he snorted, shook his mane and tail angrily, and flew away like a shot from a catapult, leaving a long trail of sparks behind him.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "Now pick up the saddle, and let's hurry to get out of sight."

They crawled through the hedge, Michel dragging saddle and bridle behind him. On the other side, they crouched down and listened.

They could still hear the horse clattering over the stones, in his mad gallop.

"Do you hear that?" said the baron, with satisfaction.

"Yes; but we are not the only ones to hear it, Monsieur le Baron," said Petit-Pierre. "Here's the echo!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN WHICH MASTER JACQUES KEEPS HIS OATH
TO AUBIN COURTE-JOIE.

IN a moment the sounds which Baron Michel and Petit-Pierre heard from the quarter where Courtin had vanished from sight changed to a confused uproar, which grew louder and louder. And in two minutes more a score of chasseurs—hot on the tracks, or, more accurately, on the noise which the Marquis de Souday's horse made as he fled, accompanied by furious neighing—passed like a cyclone within ten feet of our fugitives, who rose to their feet as the horsemen went by, and followed them with their eyes in their mad race.

"They go at a fair pace," said Petit-Pierre; "but, all the same, I doubt if they overtake him."

"Especially," suggested the baron, "as they will pass the very spot where our friends are waiting for us; and I have an idea that the marquis will be in just the frame of mind to make them slacken their pursuit."

"Fighting, in that case!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "Yesterday in the water, to-day under fire. I like the last better."

He tried to lead Michel in the direction in which the battle was likely to come off.

"Oh, no, no!" said Michel, holding back. "No, I beg you; don't go there!"

"Are n't you anxious for an opportunity to fight under the eyes of your fair one, baron? She will be there, you know!"

"I fancy so," said the youth, sadly. "But, you see, the soldiers are scattered about everywhere through the fields; if they hear firing, they will hasten toward it. We may fall in with one of their parties; and if I were to make such a mess as that of the mission intrusted to me, I should never dare to show my face before the marquis —"

"Before his daughter, you mean."

"Well, yes."

"In that case, I promise to do as you say; so as not to make trouble between you and your lovely friend."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Michel, eagerly, seizing Petit-Pierre's hands; but the next moment he seemed to realize the impropriety of such a performance.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" he exclaimed, falling back a step.

"It's all right," said Petit-Pierre; "don't worry about that. Where did the Marquis de Souday propose to stow me away?"

"In a farmhouse of mine."

"Not Friend Courtin's, I trust."

"Oh, no! In another one which stands entirely alone in the woods on the other side of Légé. Do you know the village where Tinguy used to live?"

"Yes; but do you know the way to get there?"

"Perfectly."

"I'm a little suspicious of that adverb here in France. My poor Bonneville also knew his way perfectly, and yet he went astray."

He sighed at the remembrance, and murmured, —

"Poor Bonneville! Alas, that mistake of his was very likely the cause of his death!"

This retrospect naturally carried his mind back to the melancholy thoughts with which it was filled when

he left the house where the catastrophe which cost his earlier companion his life had occurred. He relapsed into silence, and with a consenting gesture, followed in the wake of his new guide, replying only by monosyllables to the rare questions he addressed to him.

Michel acquitted himself of his newly assumed functions with infinitely more address and success than would have been expected. He bore away to the left across a piece of open country, and reached a brook which he was familiar with from having many a time caught crawfish there in his childhood. This brook flowed through the valley of La Benaste from end to end,—from south to north,—and emptied into the Boulogne near Saint Colombin.

The banks, with meadows on either hand, afforded a safe and convenient road.

Leaving the brook, after following it for about a kilometre, he bore again to the left, climbed a small hill, and pointed out to Petit-Pierre the black masses of the forest of Touvois, which towered up in the darkness at the foot of the hill on which they were standing.

"Is that your farm, so soon?" Petit-Pierre asked.

"No, we shall have to cross Touvois forest; but we shall be there in three quarters of an hour."

"Is Touvois forest safe?"

"Probably. The soldiers know well enough that it's not healthy for them to venture in our forests in the night."

"And you're not afraid of losing your way there?"

"No; for we shall not really go into the forest until we strike the road from Machecoul to Légé, which we must necessarily do if we skirt the forest to the eastward."

"And then?"

"Why, then we have only to follow the road."

"Come on, then," said Petit-Pierre. "I shall have a good account to give of you, my young guide; and it shall not be Petit-Pierre's fault, I promise you, if your courageous devotion fails to obtain the reward it aspires to. But here's a road which seems quite passable. Is it not the one we're looking for?"

"It's very easy to ascertain. There should be a post on the right. — Ah, look, here it is! This is the road. And now, Petit-Pierre, I venture to promise you a comfortable night."

"Indeed, I shall be glad of it," said Petit-Pierre, drawing a long breath; "for I won't pretend to deny that the fearful excitement and emotion of the day have but ill repaired the fatigue of last night."

He had barely ceased speaking when a dark shadow rose on the other side of the ditch, leaped across into the road, and a man, seizing him roughly by the collar, cried, in a voice of thunder, —

"Halt, or you're a dead man!"

Michel rushed to the rescue of his comrade, dealing his assailant a heavy blow on the head with the leaden handle of his whip.

But he was within an ace of paying dear for his generous intervention.

The man, without releasing Petit-Pierre, whom he held with his left hand, pulled a pistol from inside his coat, and fired at Michel.

Luckily for the poor fellow, however weak Petit-Pierre was, he was not simple enough to remain so quiescent as the man with the pistol would have liked. He saw the murderous movement; and with still greater promptitude, he knocked up the arm which held the weapon so opportunely that the bullet, which but for

his movement would inevitably have pierced the baron's breast, simply grazed his shoulder.

Michel returned to the charge; and the assailant was drawing a second pistol from his belt, when two other persons leaped out of the bushes and seized Michel from behind.

Thereupon the first comer, seeing that Michel was no longer able to do any harm, contented himself with saying to his assistants,—

"Just shoot that fellow; and when you have done with him, you can put this one out of the way, too."

"Pray, by what right do you stop us in this way?" Petit-Pierre ventured to inquire.

"By right of this," the man replied, pointing to his carbine, which was slung over his shoulder. "Why? You shall know very soon. Bind the fellow with the whip tight. As for this one," he added, with a contemptuous wave of his hand toward Petit-Pierre, "it's not worth while; I don't think we shall have any great difficulty in making him follow us."

"But tell me where you are going to take us," Petit-Pierre insisted.

"Oho, you're very inquisitive, my young friend!" the man replied.

"But still —"

"*Pardieu!* Be moving, if you're so anxious to know. You will see very soon with your own eyes."

Taking Petit-Pierre's hand in his own, his captor drew him into the dense woods; while Michel, still struggling sturdily, followed behind, under the impulsion of the two acolytes.

They went on thus for ten minutes, when they reached the clearing with which we are already acquainted as the abode of Master Jacques, the master

of the Rabbits; for he it was who, to fulfil his promise to Courte-Joie literally, had held up the first two travellers whom chance had thrown in his way. And it was the report of his pistol which sent all the insurgents under cover, as related at the end of a former chapter.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHEREIN IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT ALL THE JEWS
ARE NOT FROM JERUSALEM, NOR ALL THE TURKS
FROM TUNIS.

"HALLO there, Rabbits!" shouted Master Jacques, on arriving at the clearing.

At their leader's voice the obedient Rabbits started up from behind the bushes tufts of furze and of broom, to which they had flown at the first alarm, and crowded into the clearing, where they proceeded to examine the prisoners as closely as the darkness permitted. It seemed, however, that a more careful scrutiny was deemed advisable; for one of them went down into the burrow, lit two pieces of spruce, and held them under the noses of Petit-Pierre and his companion.

Master Jacques meanwhile had resumed his former seat on the tree-trunk, and was talking tranquilly with Aubin Courte-Joie, to whom he was describing the incidents of the capture he had made, with no more excitement than that with which a villager tells his wife of the rare bargain he made at the market.

Michel, who was naturally excited by this, his first affray, and the wound he had received, was seated, or lying, in the grass; Petit-Pierre, standing beside him, was gazing with curiosity, not free from disgust, at the faces of the bandits, who, having satisfied their curiosity, had resumed their interrupted occupations, — their psalmody, that is to say, and their games, their slumbers, and the care of their weapons.

Nevertheless, while playing and drinking and singing and cleaning their guns, carbines, and pistols, they never for an instant lost sight of their prisoners, who had been placed for greater security, in the centre of the clearing.

At last, as his glance wandered from the bandits to his comrade, Petit-Pierre noticed for the first time that Michel was wounded.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" he cried, as he saw the blood which had rolled down his arm to his hand; "you are wounded?"

"I believe so, mad — mons —"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, say *Petit-Pierre*, until further orders, and now more than ever! Are you in much pain?"

"No; it felt as if I received a blow on my shoulder, but my arm is all stiff."

"Try to move it."

"Oh, I'm sure there's nothing broken. See!"

He seemed to have no difficulty about moving the arm, as he said.

"Good! I'm glad of that! The wound will be a great assistance in carrying by storm the heart of your beloved; and if your gallant conduct does not suffice, I promise you that I will intervene. I have abundant reason for believing that my intervention will be effective."

"How kind (*bonne*)¹ you are!"

"How *kind! kind! kind!* (*bon! bon! bon!*) Don't forget again, you wretched boy!"

"No, I won't, Petit-Pierre; after such a promise as that, if you should order me to storm a battery of a hundred pieces of cannon, unaided, I would rush at the

¹ By applying to Petit-Pierre the adjective *bonne* (feminine), the incognito of course was endangered. He entreats him to say *bon*, the masculine form.

redoubt with my head down. Ah, if you would speak to the Marquis de Souday, I should be the happiest of men!"

"Don't gesticulate so vigorously; you will prevent the flow of blood from stopping. Aha! so it seems that it's the marquis whom you particularly dread. Very well; I will speak to this awe-inspiring marquis, on the honor of—Petit-Pierre. But while they leave us in peace," he continued, with a hasty glance around, "let us talk of our present situation. Where are we, and who are these fellows?"

"Why, they have every appearance of being Chouans," said Michel.

"Chouans holding up inoffensive travellers? It's not possible!"

"Such things have been known, however."

"Oh, it can't be."

"Even if they have never been known before, I greatly fear that to-day they have been."

"But what are they going to do with us?"

"We shall know very soon; for you see they are moving about, and no doubt it's with a view of doing us the honor of deciding our fate."

"Oh, the idea!" said Petit-Pierre, "it would be very interesting if we should be in danger from my own adherents. At all events, keep silence!"

Michel made a gesture which implied that there was no indiscretion to be anticipated on his part.

As he had judiciously observed, Master Jacques, having taken counsel with Courte-Joie and some of his own men, ordered the prisoners to be brought before him.

Petit-Pierre walked coolly toward the tree where the master of the Rabbits was holding his assizes; but Michel,

who found some difficulty in standing up, on account of his wound and his bound wrists, was not so quick to obey; whereupon Aubin Courte-Joie made a sign to Trigaud, who seized the young man by the waist, took him up as easily as another would have done with a child of three years, and deposited him on the ground in front of Master Jacques, taking great care to place him in exactly the same position he was lying in when he picked him up,—an operation which Trigaud the Vermin performed very cleverly by throwing Michel's lower extremities forward, and then upsetting his centre of gravity, instead of dropping him on the ground in a heap.

"Blockhead!" muttered Michel, losing his wonted timidity under the stress of physical pain.

"You are not polite," said Master Jacques; "no, I say again, you are not polite, Monsieur le Baron Michel de la Logerie! and this good fellow's attentions deserve more courteous acknowledgment. But a truce to these trifles! Let us come to our little matters."

Gazing more attentively at the young man, he continued:—

"I am not mistaken; you are really M. le Baron Michel de la Logerie?"

"Yes," replied Michel, briefly.

"So far, so good! Now be good enough to tell me what you were doing in the heart of Touvois forest at this time of night."

"I might well reply that I am not accountable to you, and that the roads are free to all."

"But you won't make any such reply, Monsieur le Baron."

"Why should I not?"

"Because, saving your presence, you would be talking

nonsense, and you have too much common-sense for that."

"How so?"

"Why, because you must see that you are accountable to me, since I call upon you to give an account of yourself; and because you must see, also, that the roads are not free, since you were prevented from going where you wished to go."

"All right; I won't argue with you. I was going to my farmhouse, the Banlœuvre, which, as you know, is at one end of Touvois forest, in which we now are."

"That's right, Monsieur le Baron; do me the honor to answer so all the time, and we shall get along famously. Now, how does it happen that Monsieur le Baron de la Logerie, who has so many fine horses in his stables, so many handsome vehicles in his carriage-house, is travelling on foot, as simple peasants like ourselves might do?"

"We had a horse, but he fell with us, and got away, and we couldn't catch him."

"Good again! Now, Monsieur le Baron, I trust you will be good enough to tell us the news."

"I?"

"Yes. What's going on over there, Monsieur le Baron?"

"What interest have you in what is going on in our neighborhood?" demanded Michel, who, being still somewhat in the dark as to whom he was dealing with, did not quite know how he ought to frame his replies.

"Tell me all the same, Monsieur le Baron," retorted Jacques; "don't disturb yourself as to what you think may be useful or useless to me to know. Come, overhaul your memory. Whom did you meet on your road?"

Michel looked at Petit-Pierre in some embarrassment. Master Jacques intercepted the look, and ordered Trigaud the Vermin to station himself between the two prisoners like "Wall" in the "Mid-Summer Night's Dream."

"Well," said Michel, "we met what one meets at all hours and on all the roads about Machecoul these three days,—soldiers."

"Of course they spoke to you?"

"No."

"No? Do you mean to say they let you pass without speaking to you?"

"We avoided them."

"Nonsense!" remarked Master Jacques, incredulously.

"We were travelling on our own business, and it did n't suit us to be forced to meddle with what in no way concerned us."

"And who is the youth with you?"

Petit-Pierre made haste to reply before Michel had time to do so.

"I am Monsieur le Baron's servant," said he.

"In that case, my friend," retorted Master Jacques, "allow me to suggest that you are a very poor servant; and, upon my word, peasant as I am, it disgusts me to hear a servant reply for his master, especially when he is not spoken to.

"So this youth is your servant, is he?" he continued, addressing Michel again. "He's a very proper fellow!"

The master of the Rabbits examined Petit-Pierre with the greatest care, while one of his men held the torch in the youth's face, to enable him to scrutinize him more satisfactorily.

"Just tell us what you want, will you?" demanded Michel. "If it's my purse, I don't propose to defend it; take it, and let us go about our business."

"Oh, fie! for shame!" exclaimed Master Jacques; "if I were a gentleman like you, Monsieur Michel, I would ask your pardon for such an insult. Look you! do you take us for highwaymen? That's not at all flattering, do you know; and except that I fear to displease you, I would reveal myself to you in my true colors. But you don't mix in politics. Monsieur your father, however, whom I had the privilege of knowing slightly, did go into politics considerably, and he did n't fail to find his profit in so doing. I confess that I expected to find in you a zealous adherent of his Majesty Louis Philippe."

"You were greatly mistaken, then, my dear sir," interposed Petit-Pierre, unceremoniously; "M. le Baron is, on the contrary, a very zealous partisan of Henri V."

"Really, my young friend?" cried Master Jacques.

"You hear, Monsieur le Baron," he continued, turning to Michel, "what your companion — no, I am wrong — your servant says; is it true?"

"It is the exact truth," replied Michel.

"Ah, that fills my cup with joy! And just fancy! I thought I had to do with wretched dogs of patriots! *Mon Dieu!* how ashamed I am to have treated you in such fashion, and what humble apologies I owe you! Accept them, Monsieur le Baron; and do you take your share of them, my young friends, and give me your hands on it, both of you, — servant as well as master. I am not proud, you see."

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Michel, whose ill-humor was far from being appeased by the ironical courtesy of Master Jacques; "you have a very simple way of showing your regret. Just send us back where you took us from."

"Oh, no!" said Master Jacques.

"What! no?"

"No, no, no! I can't allow you to leave me in any such way; besides, two partisans of the legitimist cause like ourselves, Monsieur le Baron Michel, ought to discuss together the burning question of an appeal to arms. Don't you think so, Monsieur le Baron?"

"Very good; but the best interests of that same cause demand that we — my servant, that is, and myself — should at once bestow ourselves in security at Baulœuvre."

"Monsieur le Baron, no place of refuge, I give you my word, is safer than that where you now are, in our midst; nor can I suffer you to quit us before I have given you a proof of my deep interest in you."

"Humph!" muttered Petit-Pierre, "this is getting decidedly tiresome."

"Bring on your proof," said Michel.

"You are devoted to Henri V.?"

"Yes."

"Very devoted?"

"Yes."

"Enormously?"

"I have told you so."

"You have, and I don't doubt it. Very well; I propose to furnish you with the means of manifesting your devotion in a most striking manner."

"Go ahead."

"You see all these fine fellows," said Master Jacques, pointing to the members of his band, — "there are forty or more of them, and they look more like the bandits of Callot than honest peasants; they ask nothing better than to give their lives for our young king and his heroic mother, but they lack everything essential to enable them to attain that object, — weapons to fight with, clothes in which to fitly array themselves for the fight, money to ameliorate the hardships of camp

life. I am sure, Monsieur le Baron, that you will shudder at the thought that all these worthy retainers should be exposed, in the performance of what you yourself consider a sacred duty, to all the diseases which result from constant exposure in all weathers,—colds in the head, rheumatism, and inflammation of the lungs.”

“Where in the devil do you suppose I can find clothes and weapons for your men?” replied Michel. “Am I a walking storehouse and arsenal?”

“Ah, Monsieur le Baron,” said Master Jacques, “do you think that I know so little of the world as to have dreamed of wearying a man like you with matters of detail? No; I have a wonderfully clever follower here,” pointing to Aubin Courte-Joie, “who will spare you all the trouble. All you have to do is to find the wherewithal, and he will put it to the best possible use, and be economical with it too.”

“If that’s all you want,” said Michel, with the thoughtless lavishness of youth, and the enthusiasm of new-born political ardor, “you shall have it, with all my heart! How much do you want?”

“Better and better!” exclaimed Jacques, considerably amazed at this unlooked for readiness. “Let’s see; would it seem exorbitant to you if I were to ask you for five hundred francs per man? You understand that I should like them to have besides their uniforms—green, like those of M. de Charette’s chasseurs—well-filled haversacks? Five hundred francs,—that is about half of the sum which Philippe pays France for every man she supplies him with; and every one of my men is well worth two of Philippe’s soldiers. You see how reasonable I am.”

“Tell me in two words what sum you demand, and be done with it.”

"Very well: I have about forty men, including those who are absent on leave, but ready to join the colors at the first summons; that makes just twenty thousand francs, — a mere bagatelle for a rich man like you, Monsieur le Baron."

"So be it; in two days you shall have your twenty thousand francs," said Michel, trying to rise; "I give you my word."

"Oh, no indeed! We wish to save you all the trouble that we can, Monsieur le Baron. You must have a friend somewhere in the neighborhood, — a notary who will advance that sum. Just write him a little note, very urgent, but very gentlemanly, and one of my men will undertake to hand it to him."

"Willingly; give me writing-materials, and unbind my hands."

"Compère Courte-Joie will supply you with pen, ink, and paper."

Master Aubin at once began to pull an ink-stand out of his pocket; but at this point Petit-Pierre came forward.

"One moment, Monsieur Michel," said he, resolutely; "and do you, Master Courte-Joie, if that's your name, put away your utensils; they won't be needed."

"Hallo! indeed, Monsieur servant!" exclaimed Master Jacques. "Why won't they be needed, I beg to know?"

"Because such performances, monsieur, remind one a little too strongly of the bandits of Calabria and Estramadura to be tolerated in men who claim to be soldiers of Henri V; because it's downright extortion, and I will not permit it."

"You, my young friend?"

"Yes, I!"

"If I believed that you were really what you pretend to be, I should treat you as one treats impudent lackeys; but it seems to me that you have some title to the respect due to womankind, and I shall be careful not to compromise my reputation by being rough with you. I will confine myself for the present, then, to entreating you not to meddle in what does n't concern you."

"It does deeply concern me, monsieur, on the contrary," returned Petit-Pierre, with majestic dignity; "for it is of the utmost importance that you should not use the name of Henri V. as a cloak for acts of brigandage."

"Oho! it seems to me you are extremely solicitous about his Majesty's affairs, my young friend. You will be kind enough to tell me by what right, will you not?"

"Send your men away and I will tell you, monsieur."

"Aha!" said Master Jacques. "Move away a little, Rabbits," he continued, turning to his followers, who at once obeyed.

"It was n't necessary," said he, "for I have no secrets from the varlets; but then, there 's nothing I would n't do to please you, as you see. Now we are alone; so speak."

"Monsieur," said Petit-Pierre, taking a step toward Master Jacques, "I command you to set that young man at liberty; I wish you to furnish us with an escort, and send us at once to our destination; also to send and hunt up the friends we are expecting."

"You wish! you command! On my soul, my turtle dove, you speak like the king on his throne. And if I refuse, what should you say?"

"If you refuse, I will have you shot within twenty-four hours."

"Will you hear that? Is it to Madame la Regent, then, that I have the honor of speaking?"

"To herself, monsieur."

Thereupon Master Jacques was seized with a fit of convulsive laughter, and his Rabbits at once drew near to have their share in the hilarity.

"Oh, Lord!" said he, when they had all returned to their former stations, "I can't hold it in any longer. My poor Rabbits, you were amazed just now, were n't you, when M. le Baron de la Logerie, son of the Michel whom you know of, announced to us that Henri V. has no better friend than he; but that is nothing compared to what I have to tell you now. Here's something which goes beyond what the most riotous imagination can conceive for downright, incredible cheek. Do you know who this pretty little peasant is, whom you were at liberty to take for what you chose, but whom I looked upon as neither more nor less than M. le Baron's mistress? Well, my little Rabbits, you were wrong, and so was I, — we were all wrong; this young unknown is, if you please, the mother of our king!"

A murmur of incredulity ran through the ranks of the insurgents.

"And I swear to you," cried Michel, "that what she has told you is the truth."

"Oh, a valuable piece of evidence, on my word!" retorted Master Jacques.

"I assure you —" Petit-Pierre interposed.

"No," returned Master Jacques, "*I assure you* that if within ten minutes, which I give you for reflection, your squire, my lovely errant dame, does not take the course I have pointed out to him as his only salvation, he will go to join the acorns which hang above our heads. Let him choose quickly between the bag of

gold and the rope; if I don't receive the one, he shall not lack the other."

"Why, this is infamous!" cried Petit-Pierre, beside himself.

"Seize him!" said Jacques.

Four of the band came forward to execute the order.

"Let's see," said Petit-Pierre, "which of you will dare to lay his hand on me!"

As Trigaud, heeding little the majesty of words or bearing, continued to advance, Petit-Pierre, recoiling from the touch of his grimy hand, tore off her hat and wig together.

"What!" he exclaimed, "among all these bandits, is there not one soldier who recognizes me? Will God leave me, helpless, at the mercy of such cut-throats?"

"Oh, no," said a voice behind Master Jacques; "and here is one who dares say to Monsieur that his conduct is unworthy of a man wearing a cockade which is white only because it is without stain."

Master Jacques turned, quick as lightning, and already had a pistol covering the new-comer. All the bandits leaped to their weapons; and it was beneath an arch of bristling metal that Bertha — for it was she — entered the circle which surrounded the prisoners.

"The She-wolf! the She-wolf!" muttered some of Master Jacques' men, who knew Mademoiselle de Souday by sight.

"What's your business here?" cried the leader of the Rabbits. "Don't you know that I utterly deny the authority which your father arrogates over my band, and that I refuse to join his division?"

"Be silent, villain!" said Bertha.

She walked straight up to Petit-Pierre, and knelt on one knee before him.

"I ask your pardon," she said, "in the name of these men who have insulted and threatened you, — you who have such abundant claim to their respect."

"'Pon my soul," said Petit-Pierre, gayly, "you arrive most opportunely! The situation was just becoming decidedly unpleasant; and yonder's a poor fellow who owes you something very like his life, for these gentry were talking of nothing less than hanging him and sending me to bear him company."

"*Mon Dieu!* yes," said Michel, whom Aubin Courte-Joie, seeing the turn affairs had taken, made haste to set free.

"The saddest part of such a catastrophe," added Petit-Pierre, smiling benignly, "would have been that this youth is altogether worthy of the interest of a good Royalist like you."

Bertha smiled at this, and cast down her eyes.

"It is for you, therefore, to pay my debt to him," continued Petit-Pierre. "And you won't take it ill of me, will you, if I fulfil the promise I have made him by saying a word or two to your father?"

Bertha leaned over to kiss Petit-Pierre's hand, thus hiding the blush which rose to her cheeks.

Meanwhile Master Jacques, thoroughly abashed by his mistake, had approached, and was stammering out apologies.

In spite of the profound repulsion the man inspired in her, Petit-Pierre realized that it would be impolitic to exhibit anything more than a natural amount of resentment.

"Your intentions may have been of the best, monsieur," said he, "but your manners are deplorable, and are likely to have no other effect than to bring upon you all the fate of highwaymen, like the companions

of Jehu. I trust that you will mend your ways in future.

"Now," said Petit-Pierre to Bertha, turning his back on the others, as if they had ceased to exist for him, "tell me how you happened to come just when you did."

"Your horse got scent of ours," Bertha replied. "As he passed, we caught him and got out of the way, as we heard the chasseurs on his track. When we saw the two bunches of thorns with which the poor creature was adorned, we came to the conclusion that you must have got rid of the animal to facilitate your own escape; so we all scattered to hunt you up, agreeing to meet at Banlœuvre. I was on my way through the forest when the lights attracted my attention, as well as the sound of voices. I left my horse, for fear he might betray me by neighing, and crept up to you. In the general preoccupation, no one saw or heard me. You know the rest, madame."

"Good!" replied Petit-Pierre. "And now if Monsieur will be good enough to give me an escort, let us be off to Banlœuvre, Bertha; for I confess that I am so tired I am ready to drop."

"I will escort you myself, madame," replied Master Jacques, with deep respect; and Petit-Pierre assented with a nod.

Master Jacques did things well.

Ten of his men marched ahead to keep the road clear, while he himself, accompanied by ten others, escorted Petit-Pierre, mounted upon Bertha's horse.

Two hours later, just as Petit-Pierre, Bertha, and Michel were finishing their supper, the marquis and Mary arrived; and M. de Souday expressed the greatest joy at finding him, whom he called his young friend, in safety.

We ought, in justice, to add that the marquis, being first of all a man of the old *régime*, his joy, intense and genuine though it was, was tempered by marks of the utmost respect.

In the evening, Petit-Pierre had a long interview with the Marquis de Souday in a corner of the hall,—an interview followed by Bertha and Michel with the liveliest interest, which became even more intense when Jean Oullier entered the farmhouse. At that moment M. de Souday approached the young people, and said to Michel, taking Bertha's hand, —

"M. Petit-Pierre informs me that you aspire to the hand of Mademoiselle Bertha my daughter. I may have had other ideas for her establishment in life; but in view of his gracious persistence, I can only say to you, monsieur, that after the campaign my daughter shall be your wife."

Lightning striking at Michel's feet could not have stupefied him more thoroughly.

While the marquis was placing Bertha's hand in his, he tried to turn in Mary's direction, as if to implore her intervention.

But her voice whispered in his ear these terrible words, —

"I do not love you!"

Overwhelmed with grief and surprised beyond belief, Michel mechanically took the hand the marquis tendered him.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MASTER MARC.

ON the day marked by the divers occurrences in the house of the Widow Picaut, at the Château de Souday, in Touvois forest, and at the farmhouse of Banlœuvre, which have occupied our attention in recent chapters, the door of Number 17, Rue du Château, Nantes, opened about five in the afternoon to give egress to two persons, in one of whom might have been recognized the civil commissary Pascal, whose acquaintance our readers have already made at the Château de Souday, and who had regained his domicile without interference during the night.

The other, who is now to occupy our attention for a short time, was a man of some forty years, with a bright, intelligent eye, hooked nose, white teeth, and lips thick and sensual, such as imaginative people generally have. His black coat, white cravat, and ribbon of the Legion of Honor, indicated, so far as appearances could indicate, that he belonged to the magistracy of the country. This personage was, in fact, one of the most distinguished members of the Paris Bar, who had reached Nantes the night before, and put up at the house of his *confrère* the commissary civil.

In the Royalist vocabulary he bore the name of Marc, — one of the names of Cicero.

At the street door, whither he was escorted, as we have said, by the commissary, he found a cabriolet waiting.

He pressed his host's hand cordially, and entered the vehicle; while the driver, as if he knew the traveller's ignorance as to his destination, leaned over to the commissary, and asked him, —

"Where shall I drive, monsieur?"

"Do you see that peasant at the end of the street, on a dapple-gray horse?"

"Yes," replied the driver.

"Very well; all you have to do is follow him."

This direction had hardly left his lips when the man on the dapple-gray horse at once put his steed in motion, as if he had heard the words of the legitimist agent, went down Rue du Château, and turned to the right, so as to follow the river, which flowed at his left.

At the same time the driver stirred up his beast with a blow of the whip, and the creaking vehicle, to which we have given the somewhat ambitious name of cabriolet, began to dance over the rough pavements of the capital of the Department of Loire-Inférieure, following blindly the mysterious guide.

When the cabriolet reached the corner of Rue du Château and turned in the direction indicated, the traveller again caught sight of the horseman, who, without once looking behind, crossed the Loire by the Pont Rousseau, which leads to the Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu road.

The traveller also crossed the bridge and took the Saint Philbert road in the wake of the peasant, who had put his horse into a trot, — not so fast, however, that the cabriolet could not easily follow him.

Meanwhile the peasant did not even turn his head, and seemed not only so indifferent to what was going on behind him, but so ignorant, too, of the service he

was expected to perform as guide, that there were moments when the traveller believed himself to be the victim of some trick.

The coachman, not being in the secret, could, of course, yield no information calculated to quiet Master Marc's uneasiness; and as he had been told, when he asked where he should go, to follow the man on the dapple-gray horse, he followed the man on the dapple-gray horse, apparently thinking no more of his guide than his guide thought of him.

After two hours of travelling in this fashion, as night was beginning to fall, they arrived at Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

The man on the gray horse stopped before the *Cygne de la Croix* inn, got down from his horse, which he turned over to a hostler, and entered the inn.

The traveller arrived some minutes later, and alighted at the same inn.

In the kitchen he encountered the peasant, who, as he passed him, without any sign of recognition, slipped a piece of paper into his hand unperceived.

The traveller went into the common room, unoccupied at the moment, and ordered a bottle of wine and lights, which were brought to him.

He left the wine untasted, but unfolded the paper, which contained these words:—

“I will wait for you on the main road to Lége; follow me without trying to overtake me, or speak with me. The driver will remain at the inn with the cab.”

The traveller burned the note, poured out a glass of wine, in which he barely moistened his lips, made an appointment with the driver for the following evening, and left the inn without attracting the attention of the

landlord, — or, at least, without the landlord's giving any sign of noticing him.

When he reached the outskirts of the village, he spied his man cutting a cane in a hawthorn hedge. Having cut it, he walked along the road, trimming off the branches.

Master Marc followed him for about half a league. By that time it was quite dark. The peasant entered a house, which stood alone on the right-hand side of the road.

The traveller, having quickened his pace, entered the house almost at the same moment. When he looked in the door, there was nobody but one woman in the room looking upon the road.

The peasant was standing before her, apparently awaiting his arrival.

As soon as he appeared, —

"Here is a gentleman to be taken, — you know where," said the peasant.

Thereupon he left the house without giving the traveller time to thank him with words or with money.

He followed his guide of few words with his eyes, until he disappeared; then his wondering gaze returned to the mistress of the house. She motioned to him to take a seat, and regardless of his presence, continued to perform her household duties without a word.

A silence of more than half an hour's duration succeeded; and the traveller was beginning to lose patience, when the master of the house came in and saluted his guest, without the least token of surprise or curiosity.

He gazed inquiringly at his wife, who repeated to him, word for word, the guide's phrase: —

"Here's a gentleman to be taken, — you know where."

The master of the house thereupon cast upon the

stranger one of those uneasy, keen, swift glances, which lie within the capabilities of none but a Vendean peasant; but almost immediately his countenance resumed its habitual expression of good-humored innocence, and he walked toward his guest, hat in hand.

"Monsieur desires to travel in the province?"

"Yes, my friend," replied Master Marc, "I should like to go somewhat farther."

"Monsieur has papers, of course?"

"Certainly."

"In due form?"

"Absolutely."

"Under his *nom de guerre*, or his real name?"

"Under my real name."

"I am compelled, to avoid all possibility of error, to beg Monsieur to show them to me."

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Oh, yes; for until I have seen them, I can't tell Monsieur whether he can travel safely through the province."

The traveller produced his passport, dated the 28th February.

"Here it is," said he.

The peasant took it and glanced it over, to see if the description corresponded with the face before him. He then folded it again and returned it to the traveller, saying, —

"It is all right. Monsieur can go anywhere with this paper."

"And you will undertake to furnish me with a guide?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I should like very much to go as quickly as possible."

"I will go and saddle the horses."

He went out and returned in ten minutes.

"The horses are ready," said he.

"And the guide?"

"He is waiting."

The traveller left the house, and found a farm-laborer at the door, already in the saddle, and holding another by the rein. Master Marc understood that the second horse was for him, and the laborer his guide.

Indeed, his foot was scarcely in the stirrup when his new conductor got under way no less silently than his predecessor had done.

It was nine o'clock, and dark as Erebus.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW PEOPLE TRAVELLED IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
LOIRE-INFÉRIEURE IN THE MONTH OF MAY, 1832.

AFTER riding along for an hour and a half without exchanging a single word, the traveller and his guide arrived before one of those buildings peculiar to the country, which are half farmhouse, half château.

The guide halted, and motioned to the traveller to do likewise. Then he alighted and knocked at the door, which was opened by a servant.

"Here's a gentleman who must speak with Monsieur," said the farm-hand.

"It's not possible," the servant replied. "Monsieur has retired."

"Already?" the traveller asked.

"Monsieur passed last night at a meeting, and a great part of the day on horseback," said the servant.

"Never mind," said the guide; "this gentleman must speak with him. He comes from M. Pascal, and is on his way to join Petit-Pierre."

"That makes a difference," said the servant. "I will go and wake Monsieur."

"Ask him," said the traveller, "if he can give me a reliable guide. I ask nothing more."

"I don't think Monsieur will do that," the servant replied.

"What will he do, then?"

"He will guide Monsieur himself."

He re-entered the house, and appeared again, very shortly.

"Monsieur desires to know if Monsieur needs any refreshment, or if he prefers to push right on without stopping."

"I dined at Nantes, and need nothing. I should much prefer to go right on."

The servant again disappeared, and in a few moments a young man approached them, — the master, this time.

"Under any other circumstances, monsieur," said he, "I should insist upon your doing me the honor of resting a moment under my roof. But you are doubtless the gentleman from Paris whom Petit-Pierre is expecting?"

"Just so, monsieur."

"Monsieur Marc, I presume?"

"Monsieur Marc."

"That being so, let us not lose a moment; for you are impatiently awaited."

Turning to the farm-hand, he asked, —

"Is your horse fresh?"

"He has done only a league and a half since morning."

"In that case, I will take him; mine are used up. Stay here and empty a bottle with Louis; I will return in two hours. Louis, do the honors of the establishment to this good fellow."

The young man vaulted into the saddle as lightly as if he, like his mount, had travelled no more than a league and a half that day.

"Are you ready, monsieur?" he asked the traveller.

Upon his affirmative nod, they set out together.

After a quarter of an hour of absolute stillness, a shout arose, barely a hundred feet ahead of them.

Master Marc started, and asked the meaning of it.

"It's our advance-guard," replied the Vendean leader. "He is asking, in his way, if the road is clear. Listen, and you will hear the reply."

He placed his hand upon the traveller's shoulder, stopping his own horse, so that his companion did the same.

Almost immediately a second shout was heard at a greater distance than the first. So closely did it resemble the other that it seemed like its echo.

"We can go on; the road is clear," said the Vendean chief, riding on.

"There's a scout ahead of us, then?"

"Yes; and a man behind us,—one two hundred feet ahead, and one two hundred feet in our rear."

"But who replies to the advance-guard?"

"The peasants whose cottages lie along the road. Just notice when you pass one of them. You will see a little window open, a man's head come out, remain as motionless as if it were of stone, and not disappear until we are out of sight. If we were soldiers from one of the neighboring cantonments, the man who saw us pass would immediately slip out of a back door; and if there were any meeting hereabout, those who were present would be warned in good time of the approach of the squad, which might otherwise take them by surprise."

At this point the Vendean suddenly broke off.

"Listen," said he. And they both drew rein.

"Why, I heard nothing but the call of our scout," said the traveller.

"Exactly. There was no reply."

"Which means?"

"That there are soldiers about."

With these words he started off at a trot, and the

traveller followed his example. Just then hurried steps were heard, and the man stationed in their rear came running up as fast as his legs would carry him.

At a fork in the road they found the advance-scout standing, undecided which way to take, as his call had met no response from either direction. Both roads came out at the same place, but the left-hand one was a little longer than the other.

After a hurried consultation between the chief and the guide, the latter plunged into the right-hand road. The Vendean and the traveller soon followed him, leaving their fourth companion behind. A few moments after, he, also, followed the others.

The same distances as before were maintained between the main body and its advance and rear guard.

Three hundred yards farther on, the two Royalists found their scout, who halted again. He made a gesture with his hand, enjoining silence, and then uttered these words under his breath: —

“A patrol!”

Indeed, by listening intently, they could hear, still at some distance, the regular tread of a body of troops marching; it was one of General Dermoncourt's flying columns going the rounds.

They were in one of those narrow roads so common in Vendée at that time, — even more so in the time of the first war, — but which were being replaced every day by the departmental roads; the slopes on either side were so steep that it was impossible to climb them on horse-back; so the only way to avoid the patrol was to turn back till they came to a spot where they could sheer off to one side or the other.

But our friends could hear the tread of the troops, therefore the troops could hear the tread of the horses, and would be likely to start in pursuit.

Suddenly the scout called the attention of the Vendean chief. By a fleeting moonbeam, he had caught sight of the reflection of bayonets, and his raised finger pointed out to the Vendean and the traveller the direction they must follow.

The soldiers (to avoid the water which generally runs in the narrow roads after heavy rains) instead of following the trodden path between the two slopes, had climbed to the top of one of them and were marching along on the other side of the hedge which lay at the left hand of the travellers.

This course would take them ten paces away from the two horsemen and two pedestrians buried in the depths of the narrow road.

If one of the horses neighed it was all up with the little band; but, as if they realized the danger, they were as silent as their masters, and the soldiers passed on, without suspecting who were in their neighborhood.

When the sound of their heavy tread was lost in the distance, the travellers breathed freely once more, and resumed their journey.

A quarter of an hour later they left the road and entered Machecoul forest. Once under the trees, their minds were easy; it was not probable that the soldiers would venture into the forest at night, or, if they did, that they would leave the main roads by which it was traversed; therefore there was nothing to fear in following one of the by-paths known to the natives.

They left their horses in charge of one of the scouts, while the other disappeared rapidly in the darkness, made denser by the foliage.

The Vendean chief and the traveller took the same course as he.

It was evident that they were approaching the end of

their journey; that was sufficiently proved by leaving their horses behind.

In fact Master Marc and his guide had not taken two hundred steps when they heard the hoot of the screech-owl.

The Vendean put his hands together at his mouth, and replied to the prolonged, mournful hoot, with the sharp cry of the brown owl.

The screech-owl's hoot was repeated.

"That's our man," said the Vendean.

In a few minutes they heard footsteps on the path and the scout appeared, accompanied by a stranger.

This was no other than our friend Jean Oullier, only, and therefore first, huntsman of the Marquis de Souday, who had given up hunting for the moment, so absorbed was he in the political storms which were brewing about him.

In the two previous presentations of this sort, the traveller had heard some such words as these exchanged between his guide and the person addressed: "Here's a gentleman who wishes to speak with Monsieur." This time the formula was varied, and the Vendean said to Jean Oullier,—

"My friend, here's a gentleman who must speak with Petit-Pierre."

To which Jean Oullier replied simply, —

"Let him come with me."

The traveller extended his hand to the Vendean, who pressed it warmly; then he put the same hand in his pocket with the intention of dividing the contents of his purse between the two scouts. But his companion divined his purpose, and placing his hand on his arm, deprecated by signs his exhibiting a liberality which the honest peasants would look upon as an insult.

Master Marc understood, and a clasp of the hand paid his debt to the peasants as it had done to their leader.

Thereupon Jean Oullier started back the way he had come, saying these two words, which had the brevity of a military order, but the accent of an invitation,—

“Follow me.”

The traveller began to be accustomed to these brief, mysterious forms, so strange to him, and which implied impending revolt at least, if not a state of actual war.

Shaded as they were by their broad hat-brims, he had hardly seen the faces of the Vendean leader and the two scouts. In the dense darkness of the woods he could hardly detect the moving form of Jean Oullier.

Gradually, however, the form which went on before him slackened its pace until he overtook it.

The traveller felt that his guide had something to say to him; he listened, and heard these words, hardly as loud as a whisper.

“We are watched; a man is following us in the woods. Don’t be alarmed if I disappear. Wait for me at the spot where you lose sight of me.”

The traveller answered with a nod which signified, “all right; go ahead!”

Fifty paces farther they went when Jean suddenly darted into the woods.

Twenty or thirty paces away, in the dense forest, there was a noise such as a kid might make, startled from its resting-place. The noise died away in the distance as rapidly as if it had been really a kid which caused it, and Jean Oullier’s heavier step could be heard in the same direction. Finally both became inaudible.

The traveller leaned against an oak and waited.

After some twenty minutes of suspense, a voice said, so close to his side that it made him jump,—

"Come on!"

It was Jean Oullier's voice; but the old keeper had returned so softly that no sound betrayed him.

"Well?" the traveller inquired.

"Blank cover!" exclaimed Oullier.

"No one?"

"Some one,—but a villain who knows the woods as well as I."

"So that you could n't overtake him?"

Oullier shook his head, as if it would have cost him too much to say that a man had escaped him.

"Do you know who it was?" the traveller continued.

"I suspect," replied Jean, shaking his fist toward the south; "but at all events it's a crafty fellow."

"Here we are," he added, as they reached the edge of the forest, where Master Marc could see the dark outlines of the farmhouse of Banlœuvre rising before him.

Jean Oullier looked carefully on both sides of the road; it was clear as far as the eye could reach.

He crossed the road alone, and unlocked the gate with a pass-key.

When the gate was opened he called his companion, who hastened across and disappeared through the open gate, which closed behind them.

A white form appeared on the stoop.

"Who goes there?" asked a woman's voice, loud and imperative.

"I, Mademoiselle Bertha," replied Jean Oullier.

"Are n't you alone, my friend?"

"I have with me the gentleman from Paris, who desires to speak with Petit-Pierre."

Bertha descended the steps and went forward to meet the traveller.

"This way, monsieur," said she.

She conducted Master Marc to a poorly furnished parlor, the floor of which, however, was beautifully waxed, and the hangings as white as snow.

A fire was blazing on the hearth, and near the fire stood a table with supper all served.

"Be seated, monsieur," said the maiden, with perfect courtesy, which was not without a masculine flavor, and gained thereby in piquancy; "you must be hungry and thirsty; eat and drink. Petit-Pierre is asleep; but he gave orders to be aroused if anybody arrived from Paris. You are from Paris?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"In ten minutes, then, I will be at your service."

And Bertha disappeared like a vision.

The traveller remained motionless with amazement for some instants. His was an observing mind, but he had never seen such a combination of grace and fascination with decision of will. One might have fancied her the young Achilles, disguised as a woman, before he had seen the gleaming of the sword of Ulysses.

Deeply absorbed in his thoughts the traveller forgot to eat or drink.

Very soon the maiden returned.

"Petit-Pierre is ready to receive you, monsieur," said she.

He rose: Bertha walked before him, holding in her hand a short taper; she carried it high to light the stairway, and it lighted up her lovely face at the same time.

The traveller gazed admiringly at her beautiful hair and her superb black eyes; her brown skin, blooming with youth and health; and the firm and elastic step which had a touch of the goddess.

He murmured with a smile, recalling his Virgil,—that man who himself is a smile of antiquity,—

"Incessu patuit dea!"

Bertha knocked at a chamber door.

"Come in!" said a woman's voice.

The door opened, and the young girl bowed slightly as the traveller passed. It was easy to see that humility was not her principal virtue.

The door closed behind the traveller as he passed in; Bertha remained outside.

CHAPTER L.

A LITTLE HISTORY NOW AND THEN DOES NO
HARM.

THE traveller had been led by way of a wretched staircase built into the wall, to the first floor of the house. As he passed through the open door he saw a spacious room of recent construction, the walls of which exuded dampness; and the natural color of the wainscoting could be seen through the thin coat of paint which covered it.

In this room, reclining upon a bed of roughly dressed maple, he perceived a woman; and in that woman, he recognized Madame la Duchesse de Berry.

Master Marc's attention was concentrated upon her entirely.

The sheets of her wretched cot were of very fine batiste; the luxury of silky white linen was the only thing which bore any relation to her rank in society.

A shawl of alternate red and green squares served as a quilt.

A wretched plaster fireplace, with a light border of woodwork, heated the apartment, which had no furniture except a table covered with papers, on which lay a pair of pistols, and two chairs,—one near the table, on which lay a dark wig; the other was at the foot of the bed, and held a complete peasant's costume.

The princess wore on her head one of the woollen head-dresses, commonly worn by the country-women, with curls falling over her shoulders.

By the light of two candles placed upon a highly polished rose-wood night-table, evidently a relic from some old château, she was going through her correspondence.

A considerable number of letters with the seals still unbroken lay upon the same night-table, held in place by another pair of pistols doing duty as paper-weights.

Madame was apparently awaiting the traveller's arrival most impatiently; for when she saw him, she jumped half-way off the bed to give him both her hands.

He took them in his, and kissed them respectfully, and the duchesse felt a tear fall from the eyes of her faithful adherent upon that hand which he retained in his.

"A tear, monsieur!" she exclaimed. "Do you bring bad news?"

"The tear comes from my heart, madame," Master Marc replied; "it expresses nought but my devotion, and my bitter regret to find you thus alone and abandoned in a farmhouse in La Vendée, — you whom I have seen —"

He stopped; his voice was choked with tears.

The duchesse took up his sentence where he dropped it, and continued, —

"Yes, at the Tuileries, you mean, do you not, on the steps of a throne? Oh, well, dear monsieur, I was certainly less protected and less well served there than here; for here I am served and protected by devoted fidelity, while there, I was at the mercy of calculating self interest. But let us come to the point, which, I must confess, it makes me feel anxious to see you evade. News from Paris, quickly! Do you bring good news?"

"Believe, madame," replied Master Marc, — "believe that I, a man of enthusiasm, very deeply regret that I am compelled to become the messenger of prudence."

"Aha!" exclaimed the duchesse, "while my Vendean friends are giving their lives for me, my friends in Paris are *prudent*, it seems. You see that I was right when I said that I am better protected and better served here than at the Tuileries."

"Better protected it may be, madame; but better served, no! There are moments when prudence is the touchstone of success."

"But, monsieur," rejoined the impatient duchesse. "I am as well posted about Paris as you, and I know that a revolution is imminent there."

"Madame," replied the advocate, in his firm and resonant voice, "for a year and a half we have been living in the midst of *émeutes*, but no one of them has yet risen to the dignity of a revolution."

"Louis Philippe is unpopular."

"I agree; but that is not to say that Henri V. is popular, you know."

"Henri V.! Henri V.! My son's name is not Henri V., monsieur," said the duchesse. "He is Henri IV. the second."

"In that view, madame," rejoined the advocate, "he is still too young, permit me to say, for us to know his true name. Then, too, the more devoted one is to his chief, the more is he in duty bound to tell the truth to him."

"Oh, yes, the truth! I demand it; I must have it. But let it be the truth!"

"Very well, madame; this, then, is the truth. Unfortunately, the memories of nations are confined within narrow limits. As to the French nation, — that is to say, the material, brutal power which makes *émeutes* and sometimes revolutions, — when they are breathed upon from on high, they remember two great

events, one of which goes back forty-three years and the other seventeen. The first is the taking of the Bastille, — the victory of the people over royalty; the victory which gave the tricolored flag to the nation. The second is the double restoration of 1814 and 1815, — the victory of royalty over the people; the victory which forced the white flag upon the country. Now, madame, in great movements everything is symbolical. The tricolored flag is liberty. On it is written, in words of fire, 'By this sign thou shalt conquer!' The white flag is the standard of despotism. On its double face it bears the words, 'By this sign thou hast been conquered!'"

"Monsieur!"

"Ah, but you wish for the truth, madame! Therefore let me tell you the truth."

"Very well. But when you have done, you must allow me to reply."

"Yes, madame; and I shall be very happy if your reply convinces me."

"Go on."

"You left Paris on the 28th July, madame. Therefore you failed to see the furious rage with which the people tore the white flag in pieces and trampled under foot the *fleurs-de-lis* —"

"The flag of Denain and Taillebourg! The *fleurs-de-lis* of Saint Louis and Louis XIV.!"

"Unfortunately, madame, the people remember no battle but Waterloo; they know no king but Louis XVI., — a defeat and an execution. Now, do you know, madame, the great difficulty which I foresee for your son, — the last descendant, that is to say, of Saint Louis and Louis XIV? It is that very flag of Taillebourg and Denain. If his Majesty Henry V., or Henri IV.

the second, as you so cleverly call him, enters Paris with the white flag, he will never get by the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Before he reaches the Bastille he will be a dead man."

"And—suppose he enters under the tricolor?"

"That will be much worse, madame. Before he reaches the Tuileries he will be dishonored."

The duchesse started up. She said nothing, however, at the moment.

"That is the truth, perhaps," she observed, after a short silence; "but it's very hard!"

"I promised to tell you the whole truth, madame, and I have kept my promise."

"But if such is your conviction, monsieur, why do you maintain your attachment to a party which has no chance of success?"

"Because I have taken an oath of fidelity with my lips and my heart to that same white flag, without which nor with which can your son return, and because I prefer death to dishonor."

Again the duchesse remained silent for a moment.

"This is not in accord with the information I received, and which led me to return to France," she said at length.

"No, madame; undoubtedly not. But you must remember one thing,—although the truth does sometimes get to the ears of reigning princes, it never does to those who are dethroned."

"Allow me to remark, monsieur, that, as an advocate, you might be suspected of indulging in paradox."

"Paradox, you know, madame, is one of the sources of eloquence. But, at this crisis, what your royal Highness needs is not eloquence, but the truth."

"Pardon me; but you just said that the truth never

reaches the ears of dethroned princes. Either you were mistaken then, or you are deceiving me now."

The advocate bit his lips. He was caught between the horns of his own dilemma.

"Did I say '*never*,' madame?"

"You said '*never*.'"

"Well, then, we will suppose that there is one exception, and that God has permitted me to convey the truth to you."

"I will suppose so; and now I ask you to tell me why it is that truth never reaches the ears of dethroned princes."

"Because while reigning princes may be supposed to be surrounded by those whose ambition is satisfied, dethroned princes necessarily have ambitions to satisfy. Doubtless, madame, there are about you some generous hearts whose devotion to you is utterly unselfish; but there are also many persons who see in your return to France a road prepared by which they may attain reputation, wealth, and honors. There are also malcontents who have lost their former position in society, and who wish, at one and the same time, to recover it and to be revenged on those who took it from them. Now, all these people take a distorted view of facts, and fail to appreciate the situation. Their desire leads to hope, and their hope to over-confidence. They dream incessantly of a revolution which perhaps may come, but which certainly will not come when they expect it; they deceive themselves and deceive you. They begin by lying to themselves, and then they lie to you, — even to you. They lead you into danger which they are ready to incur themselves; and thence comes the error, the fatal error, which you have been made to share, madame, and which you absolutely must recog-

nize to be an error in the light of the incontestable truths which I present for your consideration, brutally, perhaps, but faithfully."

"Well, Master Cicero," said the duchesse, the more testily because these words confirmed what she had heard at the Château de Souday, "what have you brought in the folds of your toga? Is it peace, or is it war?"

"As it is agreed that we are to abide by the traditions of constitutional royalty, I will make answer to her royal Highness that, as Regent, it is for her to decide the question."

"Oh, yes, — my Chambers reserving the right, of course, to refuse supplies if my decision doesn't suit them. Oh, Master Marc, I am thoroughly acquainted with all the fictions of your constitutional *régime*, the principal inconvenience of which, in my opinion, is that most of the time is occupied with the affairs of those who talk most, and not of those who talk best. However, you must have collected the opinions of my faithful and trusty friends as to the advisability of an appeal to arms. What is it? What do you think about it yourself? We have talked much about the truth; it is sometimes a terrible spectre. Never mind; woman though I be, I do not hesitate to evoke it."

"It is because I am convinced that there is the material for twenty kings in madame's head and heart that I did not shrink from undertaking a mission which I regard as a painful one."

"Ah, now we are getting down to business! Come, less diplomacy, Master Marc; speak out boldly and firmly, as it is fitting to speak to a soldier, which I am."

She saw that the traveller had taken off his cravat and was trying to rip it open to take out a paper.

"Give it to me; give it to me!" she said impatiently. "I can do it much more quickly than you."

It was a letter written in cipher.

The duchesse glanced at it, then handed it back to Master Marc.

"I should waste time deciphering it," said she. "Do you read it to me; that should be a simple matter for you, as you doubtless know what it contains."

Master Marc took the paper from her hands, and read, without hesitation, what follows:—

"The persons to whose honor the secret has been intrusted, cannot forbear expressing their regret for the advice by following which the present crisis has been brought on; this advice was given, no doubt, by men full of zealous ardor, but who are unacquainted with the actual condition of affairs, as well as with the temper of men's minds.

"They deceive themselves as to the possibility of an uprising in Paris. It would be impossible to find twelve hundred men, not including police agents, who would agree for a crown or two, even to make a disturbance in the street, at the risk of coming in collision with the National Guard and a faithful garrison.

"They deceive themselves as to La Vendée, just as they did in the case of the South. That devoted, self-sacrificing province is overrun by a numerous army, aided by the urban population, which is almost entirely anti-legitimist; an uprising of the peasants could have no other result than laying waste the country, and strengthening the Government by its easy triumph.

"The better opinion is, that the mother of Henri V. if she be in France, ought to leave the country in all haste, after commanding all the leading men to keep quiet. Thus, instead of stirring up civil war, she would insure peace; she would have the two-fold glory of performing an action requiring great courage, and of preventing the effusion of French blood.

"The discreet friends of the legitimist cause, who have never been forewarned of intended action, who have never been consulted upon the hazardous steps that have been undertaken, and who never know what has been done until it is all over, disclaim all responsibility for what has been done in favor of those who have invented and advised it; they desire none of the possible honor, and refuse to assume the blame."

During the reading, Madame was in a state of intense agitation. Her face, ordinarily pale, became crimson. She passed her trembling hand back and forth through her hair, behind the woollen cap which she wore. She did not once interrupt the reader by word, or otherwise; but it was evident that her tranquillity was the precursor of a storm. To avert it, Master Marc hastened to say, as he handed her the paper after folding it up again,—

"I was not the writer of that letter, madame."

"No," retorted the duchesse, unable to contain herself longer; "but he who consented to be the bearer of it was quite capable of writing it."

The advocate realized that, with the ardent and impressionable nature he had to deal with, he would gain nothing by over-humility; so he drew himself up to his full height.

"Yes," said he, "and he blushes for his momentary weakness; and although he does not approve of certain expressions in the letter, he appreciates and shares the feeling which dictated it."

"The feeling!" echoed the duchesse. "Give the feeling its true name of selfish egoism. Call it prudence, which strongly resembles —"

"Cowardice, is n't it, madame? Yes, it is indeed a cowardly heart which has abandoned everything to come

and share the perils of a situation it did not advise. Selfish, indeed, is he who has come here to say to you, 'You want the truth, madame, and here it is. But, if it pleases your royal Highness to march to certain death, you will see me marching to the same goal by your side.'"

The duchesse was silent for a few moments. Then she rejoined, more mildly, "I appreciate your faithful devotion, monsieur; but you are ill acquainted with the condition of La Vendée. Your information is all derived from those who are opposed to the movement."

"Very well; let us suppose what is not so. Let us suppose that La Vendée will rise as one man; let us suppose that it will supply you with battalion upon battalion. Let us suppose that it will be unsparing of its blood and shrink from no sacrifice. La Vendée is not France."

"You have told me that the Parisian populace hate the *fleurs-de-lis* and despise the white flag. Do you undertake to say that all France shares the sentiments of the people of Paris?"

"Alas, madame, France is logical, and we are the ones who are following a phantom in dreaming of an alliance between right divine and popular sovereignty, — two words which howl themselves hoarse when they are coupled together. Divine right seems to lead by a fatality to absolutism, and France is done with absolutism."

"Absolutism! absolutism! A big word to frighten babes with."

"No, it's not a big word; it's a terrible word, that's all. We may be nearer the thing itself than we imagine. However, madame, I regret to confess that I do not think that God has reserved for your

royal son the perilous honor of muzzling the popular lion."

"And why not, monsieur?"

"Because that redoubtable beast is suspicious of him above all else. Because as soon as he spies him afar off the lion will shake his mane, sharpen his teeth and claws, and growl angrily at him as he approaches. Oh, one cannot be a descendant of Louis XIV. with impunity, madame!"

"In your judgment, then, it's all up with the Bourbon dynasty?"

"God forbid that such a thought should ever enter my brain, madame! But I think that revolutions are not to be turned backward; I think that when they have once been allowed to begin, they must not be arrested in their development. It is attempting the impossible; it is like trying to make the mountain torrent flow back to its source. Either this will be a fruitful revolution,—in which case, madame, I am sufficiently well acquainted with your patriotism to feel sure that you will be reconciled to it,—or it will be barren of results; and then the mistakes of the *de facto* rulers will serve your son far better than his own efforts could do."

"But things may endure in that situation for centuries, monsieur!"

"Madame, his Majesty Henri V. is a principle, and principles share with the Almighty the privilege of immortality."

"In your opinion, then, I ought to renounce all my hopes, abandon my friends already compromised, and leave them to seek me in vain among them when they take up arms three days hence, and to send word to them by a stranger, 'Marie Caroline, for whom you were ready to fight, for whom you were ready to

die, has given up in despair and recoiled before the hand of destiny. Marie Caroline is afraid — ' Oh, no; never, never, monsieur! "

" You will not be called upon to reproach yourself thus, madame; for your friends will not come together three days hence."

" Pray, don't you know that the uprising is appointed for the 24th? "

" Your friends, madame, should have received counter-orders."

" When? "

" To-day."

" To-day! " cried the duchesse, frowning darkly, and rising to her feet. " Whence came the order, I beg to know? "

" From Nantes."

" Who issued it? "

" The man whom you told your friends to obey."

" The maréchal? "

" He did but follow the instructions of the Parisian committee."

" In that case," cried the duchesse, " I am no longer of any account, am I? "

" On the contrary, madame," cried the messenger, falling upon one knee and clasping his hands, " you are of the utmost account; you are everything to us! It is for that reason that we protect you; it is for that reason that we are unwilling to allow you to proceed in a hopeless movement. It is for that reason that we tremble to think of risking the loss of your popularity by a defeat! "

" Monsieur, monsieur," said the duchesse, " if Maria Theresa had had advisers as timid as mine, she never would have reconquered the throne for her son."

"On the other hand, madame, it is with no other object than that of assuring the throne to your son more speedily that we say to you, 'Leave France, and let us make of you the angel of peace, instead of the demon of war.'"

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the duchesse, placing her clinched fists over her eyes; "what disgrace! what cowardice!"

Master Marc went on as if he had not heard, or rather as if the conclusions which he had in charge to make known to the duchesse were so firmly determined upon that nothing could change them.

"All arrangements have been made, so that Madame can leave France without hindrance. A vessel is cruising in the Bay of Bourgneuf. In three hours your Highness may be on board."

"Oh, noble La Vendée!" cried the duchesse, "who could have foretold that thou wouldst repulse me, that thou wouldst turn me from thy door when I came in the name of thy God and thy king? Ah, I thought that faithless Paris alone was false and ungrateful; but thou, — thou to whom I came seeking a throne, refuseth me a tomb! Oh, no, no; I could not have believed it!"

"You will go, madame, will you not?" said the messenger, still kneeling, with hands clasped.

"Yes, I will go," said the duchesse; "yes, I will leave France. But mark this well: I will never return, for I do not choose to return with strangers. They are only awaiting a favorable moment to form a coalition against Philippe, as you well know; and when the moment arrives, they will come and ask me for my son, — not because they are really any more anxious about his rights than they were about Louis XVI., in 1792, or Louis XVIII., in 1813, but as a pretext to

provide them with a faction in Paris. Well, in that event, they shall not have my son,—no, they shall not have him, not for anything in the world! I will carry him off to the Calabrian mountains, rather. Understand, monsieur, if he must buy the throne of France by the cession of a province, a city, a fortress, a house, even a cottage like this which now shelters my head, I give you my word as Regent and as mother that he never shall be king! And now I have no more to say to you. Go, monsieur, and carry back my words to those who sent you.”

Master Marc rose and bowed low to the duchesse, expecting that, as he took his leave, she would give him one at least of the two hands she had given him at his arrival; but she maintained a threatening attitude,—fists clinched and brows contracted.

“God keep your Highness!” said the messenger, thinking it best to wait no longer, and judging rightly that so long as he stood there not a muscle of that frame would move.

He was not mistaken. But the door had hardly closed upon him when Madame, exhausted by the long-continued strain, burst into convulsive sobbing, and fell back upon her bed, murmuring, —

“Oh, Bonneville, my poor Bonneville!”

CHAPTER LI.

WHEREIN PETIT-PIERRE RESOLVES TO MAKE A BRAVE
FIGHT AGAINST ADVERSE FORTUNE.

At the close of the interview we have just related, the traveller at once left the farmhouse of Banlœuvre; he was anxious to return to Nantes before midday.

A few moments after his departure, although it was scarcely dawn, Petit-Pierre, in his peasant's dress, came down from his room to the lower hall,—an enormous room, the grayish walls of which were in many places bare of the plaster which had originally covered them, and the rafters blackened with smoke. It contained a great wardrobe of polished oak, the locks and handles of which glistened in the darkness on the dull, brown mass. The remainder of the furniture of the apartment consisted of two beds with hangings of greenish serge, standing side by side, two common pitchers, and a clock in a tall, carved case, whose ticking was the only sign of life in the deathly silence.

The fireplace was high and broad; the shelf had a lambrequin of similar stuff to the bed-hangings, but its color had changed from russet green to brownish black.

On this shelf were the ornamental articles ordinarily found on farmhouse chimney-pieces,—a wax figure, covered with a glass globe, representing the Child Jesus, two porcelain jars containing artificial flowers covered with gauze to protect them from the flies, and a twig of consecrated box-wood.

Only a board partition separated this hall from the stable. There were divers holes cut in the partition, through which the farmer's cows put their heads to reach their fodder, which was placed on the floor of the room.

When Petit-Pierre opened the door a man who was warming himself at the fire rose, and respectfully moved aside to make room for the new-comer; but Petit-Pierre motioned to him to resume his seat in the chimney-corner. He took a stool and seated himself in the other corner opposite the man, who was no other than Jean Oullier.

Then he rested his head on his hand, supported his elbow on his knee, and sat there, plunged in deep reflection, while the feverish tapping of his foot which kept his whole body trembling, bore witness that Petit-Pierre was in a state of dire perplexity.

Jean Oullier, who had reasons of his own for preoccupation and anxiety, sat gloomy and silent. He had taken his pipe from his mouth when Petit-Pierre came in, and was twisting it about mechanically between his fingers; he emerged from his meditations only to heave sighs which resembled threats, or to brush the embers together on the hearth.

Petit-Pierre was the first to speak.

"Were n't you smoking when I came in, my good-man?" said he.

"Yes," replied Oullier, laconically, with a very noticeable tone of respect in his voice.

"Why don't you keep on?"

"I am afraid it's disagreeable to you."

"Nonsense! are n't we in camp, or much the same thing, my man? I am all the more desirous that you should make yourself comfortable, because, unfortunately, it's our last camp."

However enigmatical these words may have been, Jean Oullier did not allow himself to interrogate Petit-Pierre. With the marvellous tact, which characterizes the Vendean peasant, without any outward sign that he knew aught of Petit-Pierre's real quality, he did not take advantage of the permission given, and refrained from any question which might have seemed disrespectful.

Notwithstanding his own self-absorption, Petit-Pierre could but notice the clouds with which the peasant's brow was darkened.

Again he broke the silence.

"Pray, what's the matter, my dear Jean Oullier," he asked, "and why this sad and gloomy air, when I should expect, on the other hand, to find you in the highest spirits?"

"Why should I be in high spirits?" the old keeper asked.

"Because such a trusty, faithful retainer as you are, always shares the happiness of his masters; and our Amazon has worn such a contented expression for twenty-four hours past that her joy ought to be reflected upon your countenance."

"God grant that this joy of hers may last a long while!" retorted Jean, with an incredulous smile, and raising his eyes to the ceiling.

"How's this, my dear Jean! Are you prejudiced against marriages of affection? For my own part, I love them to distraction, and they are the only kind that I ever wanted anything to do with."

"I have no prejudice against marriage," replied Jean, "but I have against the bridegroom."

"Why so?"

Jean made no reply.

"Tell me," said Petit-Pierre; but Jean shook his head.

"Do, I beg you, my dear Jean! I love your two daughters — for I know that in your eyes, at all events, they are your daughters — so well that you should hide nothing from me. Although I am not our holy father the Pope, you know that I have the power to bind and unbind."

"I know that you can do much," replied Jean.

"Well, tell me, then, why you disapprove of this match?"

"Because there is a stain upon the name which the woman who marries M. Michel de la Logerie will have to bear, and it is not worth while to lay aside one of the oldest names of the province to assume that."

"Alas! my good Jean," rejoined Petit-Pierre with a sad smile, "you evidently do not know that we no longer live in an age when children are responsible for the virtues or faults of their ancestors."

"No, I did n't know that," observed Jean.

"It's burden enough, apparently," continued Petit-Pierre, "for people of our day to have to answer for themselves. Just see how often they fail! how many there are who are missing from our ranks, in which the names they bear mark them out for a place. Be grateful, then, for those who, despite the example of their fathers, despite the situation of their families, despite the temptations of ambition, keep alive in our midst the traditions of chivalrous devotion and fidelity in misfortune."

Jean Oullier raised his head, and with an expression of hate, which he did not try to conceal, he said, —

"But perhaps you don't know —"

Petit-Pierre interrupted him.

"There is nothing that I don't know," said he. "I know what your charge is against La Logerie the elder; but I also know what I owe to his son, wounded in my

defence, and still bleeding from that wound. As for his father's crime,—if his father really committed a crime, which it is for God to decide,—did he not expiate it by a violent death?"

"Yes he did," replied Jean, hanging his head in spite of himself.

"Do you dare to question the judgments of Providence? Do you dare to maintain that He, in whose presence he appeared pale and bleeding from a violent and sudden death, did not extend His pitying hand over his head? And why, when God's vengeance is satisfied, should you show yourself sterner and more implacable than the Most High?"

Jean Oullier made no reply.

Every word touched the religious chords of his soul, and shook his deep-seated hatred of Baron Michel, but did not succeed in uprooting it altogether.

"M. Michel," Petit-Pierre went on, "is a kind-hearted, brave youth, gentle and modest, simple-minded and devout; he is wealthy, which is never esteemed a drawback. I think that your young mistress, with her somewhat decided character and her independent habits, could never meet a more suitable match; I am convinced that she will be perfectly happy with him. Ask nothing more of God, my poor Jean Oullier. Forget the past," added Petit-Pierre with a sigh. "Alas! if one must needs remember forever, there is an end of love."

Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Monsieur Petit-Pierre," said he, "you speak with marvellous force, and like a good Christian; but there are things which one cannot forget at will, and unfortunately for M. Michel, my relations with his father belong to that category."

"I ask you to divulge no secrets, Jean," rejoined Petit-

Pierre, gravely ; “ but the young baron, as I have already told you, has shed his blood for me ; he was my guide, and offered me shelter in this house, which is his. I have a deeper feeling than affection for him, — I am grateful to him ; and it would cause me deep sorrow to think that my friends are disunited. So, dear Jean Oullier, in the name of your devotion to my person, which I am sure of, I ask you if not to renounce your memory, — as you have said, one cannot lay it aside and resume it at will, — at least to keep back your hatred until time, and the certainty that your former enemy’s son has made happy the maiden you reared, have had an opportunity to efface that hatred from your heart.”

“ Let happiness come from whatsoever quarter it may, and I will thank God for it ; but I do not think that it has entered the Château de Souday with Monsieur Michel.”

“ Why so, please, my good Jean ? ”

“ Because the longer I live, Monsieur Petit-Pierre, the more I doubt M. Michel’s love for Mademoiselle Bertha.”

Petit-Pierre shrugged his shoulders, impatiently.

“ Permit me to question a little your perspicacity in affairs of the heart, my dear Jean Oullier,” said he.

“ I may be wrong,” retorted the old Vendean ; “ but if this union with Mademoiselle Bertha — that is to say, the greatest honor to which your protégé could possibly aspire — is the fulfilment of his desires, why was he in such haste to leave the farmhouse, and why did he pass the night wandering about like a madman ? ”

“ If he did wander about all night,” replied Petit-Pierre, “ it was because happiness prevented his keeping still in one spot ; and if he left the farmhouse, it was in all probability because our service demanded it.”

"I trust so; I am not one of those who believe only in themselves. And although my mind is made up to leave the Château de Souday the day that Michel's son enters it, I shall pray God none the less, morning and night, for the child's happiness, and at the same time keep my eye on the youth; I will do my best to keep my presentiments from coming true, and to prevent him from bringing despair to his wife's heart instead of the happiness he promises her."

"Thanks, Jean Oullier! I may hope, then, that you will not show your teeth to my protégé any more. You promise me, do you not?"

"I will keep my hatred and my distrust at the bottom of my heart, to be brought to the surface only in case his conduct calls for it; that is as much as I dare to promise, but don't ask me to love or esteem him."

"Unmanageable race!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, in an undertone; "to be sure, it is that which makes you so grand and strong."

"Yes," replied Jean Oullier to this aside, which was uttered loud enough for the old Vendean to overhear, "yes, we have only one hate and one love, in most instances; but is it for you to complain of that, Monsieur Petit-Pierre?"

He gazed earnestly at the young man, as if to offer him a respectful challenge.

"No," replied Petit-Pierre; "I am the less inclined to complain of it, because it is almost all that remains to Henri V. of his monarchy of fourteen centuries, and it is not enough, it seems."

"Who says so?" exclaimed the Vendean, in a threatening tone, rising to his feet as he spoke.

"You will know very soon. We have been talking of your affairs, Jean Oullier, and I am not sorry; for

our talk interrupted very melancholy thoughts. Now it is time to busy myself with my own a little. What time is it ? ”

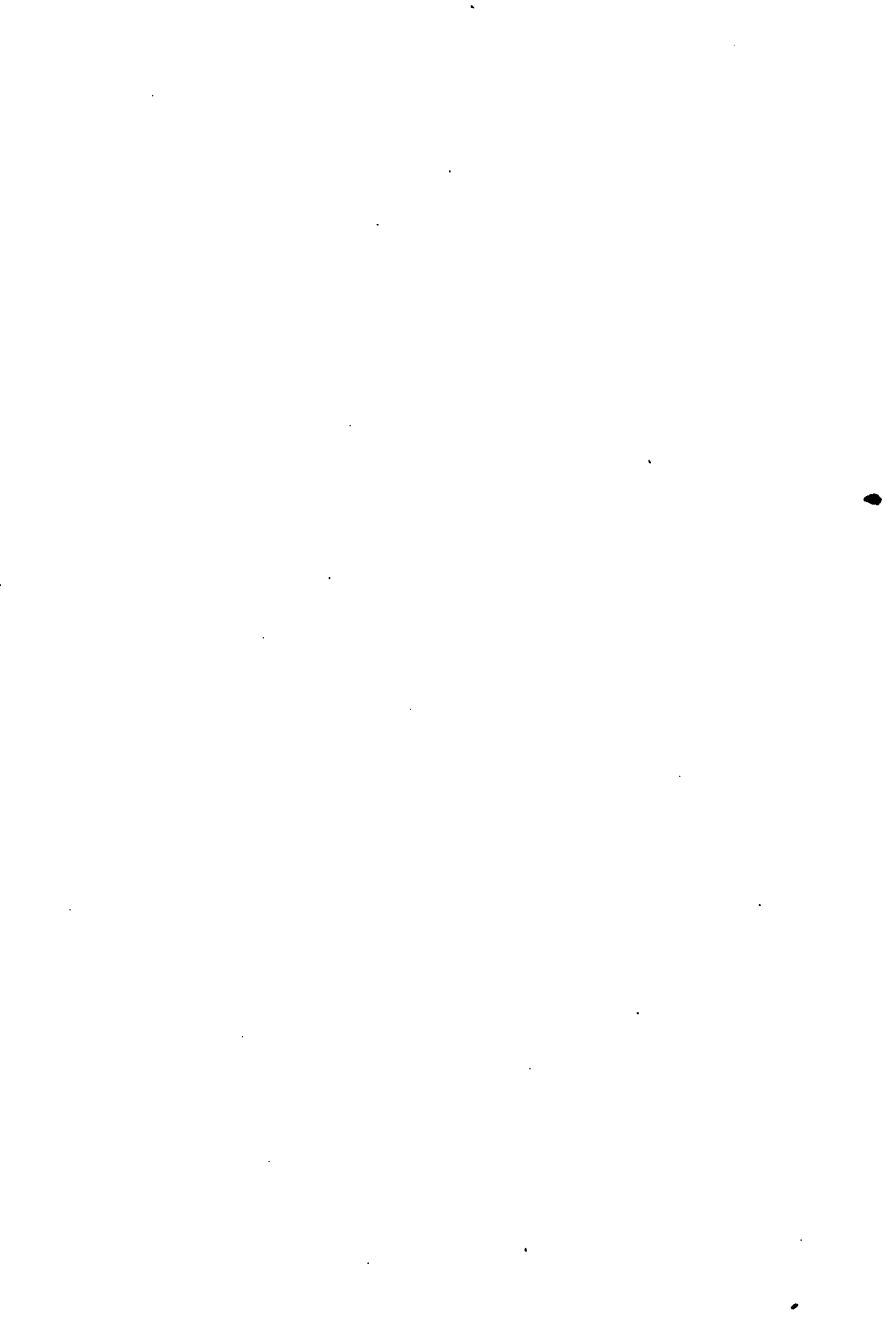
“ Half past four. ”

“ Go and rouse our friends. Politics does not interfere with their sleep ; but I know not what sleep is, for my politics is my maternal love. Farewell, my friend. ”

Jean Oullier left the room. Petit-Pierre, with bowed head, paced back and forth ; he stamped his foot impatiently, he wrung his hands despairingly, and when he returned to the fireplace two great tears were rolling down his cheeks, and his heart was overladen. He threw himself on his knees, and with clasped hands he prayed to God, who disposes of earthly thrones, to make clear His will, and to give him the unconquerable strength to continue his task, or the resignation to support misfortune.











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